University of Alberta

Indigenous Medicine and Identity in Nicaragua

by

Hugo De Burgos ©

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Dedicatoria:

A la memoria de mi madre por todos sus sacrificios y por haberme enseñado soñar, y a mi padre por los mismos méritos también.

Abstract

Through rhetoric and political action over the past twelve years, an elite of culturally conservative leaders in Nicaragua has been promoting the idea that, beyond its obvious medical value, Indigenous medicine represents an important political, historical and primordial tool for demarcating and safeguarding their culturally distinct Indigenous identity. This dissertation is based on ethnographic research I conducted in the Indigenous community of Veracruz del Zapotal, in the department of Rivas, Nicaragua, between September 2001 and December 2002. This study broadens the theoretical framework for understanding the *extra medical usages of medicine* and the role that medical configurations can play in creating and maintaining ethnic boundaries. In particular, I investigated how a group of Indigenous people of Nahua descent called Veracruceños uses medical practices and ideas to create ethnic boundaries in an effort to affirm their precariously kept ethnic identity. In general, this study also extends the theoretical schemes of ethnic boundary formation as it accounts for the constantly innovative and multi layered nature of ethnic boundaries. The research examines how previously unconscious medical practices and ideas in this Indigenous community have become consciously elaborated social activities with profound political and symbolic significance. The data I gathered shows how Indigenous medical ideas and practices constitute, for the people of Veracruz, a viable strategy to reinforce and maintain ethnic boundaries and hence their Indigenous identity in the face of an overwhelming mestizo culture and the advent of an ever-growing process of globalization.

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Table of Contents

Chapter I
Introduction

Thesis Statement 1
Framing the Research Question 6
Central Concepts and Concerns 9
Literature Review 15
Theoretical Orientation 17
Thesis Organization 21

Chapter II

Ethnographic Settings and History 25
Chapter Overview 25
Nicaragua 25
Political History 27
National Government 28
Economy 28
A Brief and General Description People and the Village 31
The Community 31
People and Territory 33
Land Tenure 34
Marriage, Family Structure, and Domestic Organization 36
Religion and Festivities 37
Making a Living 41
Community Authority: El Monéxico and la Directiva 43
Transportation and Communication 46
Health Care 48
Education 50
Social Conflict, Harmony and Witchcraft 51
Part II. Veracruceños in Historical Perspective 53
Section Overview 53
The Ancient Nahua 55
Nahua Migration to Nicaragua 55
The Spanish Conquest 57
The Colonial Period 61
Indigenous Towns in Colonial Rivas 63
The Struggle for Independence 65
The Republic 68
Indigenous Pacification and the Birth of Coffee Plantations in Nicaragua 70
Veracruceños Purchased Their Land 73
About Their Name: Veracruceños 78
The Possible Origins of the Village Of Veracruz 79

The Legalization of the Community 82
The History of La Directiva 84
The Somoza Era 87
El Período Sandinista (The Sandinistas Period) 91
Back To Conservatism and New Political Promises 99
The Emergence More Belligerent Indigenous Movement 101
Conclusion 104

Chapter III

Research Procedure 109
Chapter Overview 109
Situating the Ethnographer 109
Why Indigenous People From Nicaragua? 112
Meeting the Community 113
Getting Community Consent 115
Getting Government Permission 117
Living Arrangements While Researching 118
Participant Observation 120
Gathering the Data 123
Interviewing 124
The Survey 127
Participant observation as Hanging Out 128
Specific Ethnographic Settings 129
Festive Settings 130
1. Cantinas 130
2. Bacanales 131
Solemn Settings 133
1. Wakes and Funerals 133
2. Masses and other Religious Services 135
3. Healing Sessions 137
Issues of Translation 137
Issues of Validation 140
Conclusion 144

Chapter IV

Veracruceños' Identity: Definition, Importance and Vulnerability 146
Chapter Overview 146
Mestizos in Historical Perspective 147
What do Veracruceños Mean by Ethnic Identity? 151
Language and Identity 152
The Veracruceños' Preoccupation with their Indigenous Identity 154
Land and Group Identity 158
Nicaraguan's Double Morality on Indigenous "Things" 159
Mestizo Culture Erodes the Indigenous Culture 165
Pedro Gonzáles' Testimony 166
Discussion 173

Arturón's Morales Testimony 175
Discussion 176
Alex's Testimony 178
Discussion 182
Esban's Testimony 183
Discussion 185
Conclusion 187

Chapter V

La Medicina Indígena 194
Chapter Overview 194
La Medicina Indígena, origins and functions 195
The Medical Value of Medicine in Veracruz 199
Curanderos and Curanderas 202
Sickness Categories (Nosology) 209
A Brief Veracruceño Pharmacopoeia 213
Local Etiologies 215
Social Tensions, Witchcraft, Health, Illness, and Medicine 217
The Story of Manuel Told by his Mother, Carlota 224
An Example of Exaggerating Witchcraft and Illnesses Told by Alex 234
Alex Talks about Envy, Witchcraft and Protection 237
Witchcraft, Magic, Healing and Illness according to Cipriano Martínez 238
1. I Cipriano Martínez 239
2. Diagnostic Oracle 240
3. A Story about one of my Patients 241
4. How I lost one of my Children 242
5. How Evil Winds are Cast 243
6. No Just Anyone can Cast a Spell 245
7. How I help my Patients 246
8. I have been Falsely Accused of Witchcraft 248
9. How I Treat Cancer 250
Discussion 252
The Ethnographic Testimonies of Three healers 252
Testimony of Felipe: El Sobador (The Bone Setter) 253
Felipe's Testimony on Communal Medicine 256
The Testimony of Agustina Pavón 257
The Testimony of Rafaela Carbonero: a Midwife/herbalist 261
Discussion 265
Faith as Healing Agent 267
Medical Knowledge as Communal Property 268
Conclusion 269

Chapter VI

Medico-Cultural Strategies and the Search for Identity 273
Chapter overview 273
The Formal call to Claim Indigenous Identity Through Medicine 274

The Impact of the Estelí Medical Encounter in Veracruz 284
Medicine as a Marker of Indigenous Identity 287
Why Indigenous Medicine? 291
1. Indigenous Medicine as a Cultural Boundary 292
2. Historical Considerations 297
3. Medicine as Ontological Security 303
4. Medicine as Local Ideology Reified in Practices 308
5. Indigenous Medicine as Resistance to Modernity 311
Discussion/conclusion 317

Chapter VII
Conclusion 322
Thesis conclusion 322
Potential directions for further research 331
Final remarks 332

Bibliography 334

Appendix 1 360
Appendix 2 361
Appendix 3 363
Appendix 4 365
Appendix 5 369

List of Figures

Figure 1.2 Map of Central America showing Veracruz next to Rivas 32
Figure 2.2 Main plaza in Veracruz del Zapotal 34
Figure 3.2 Pentecostal religious service 39
Figure 4.2 The Guachipilín Devils 40
Figure 5.2 Indigenous people using traditional methods of plowing 42
Figure 6.2 The author with some members of the Monéxico 45
Figure 7.2 The friendly mestizo bus crew in Veracruz 47
Figure 8.2 Depiction of Caique Nicaragua and Gil Gonzáles' encounter 59
Figure 9.2 Copy of the Veracruz land title 77
Figure 10.2 Partial view of La Piedra Labrada 78
Figure 1.3 Pedro Gonzáles' place 121
Figure 2.3 People during a Catholic mass in Veracruz 122
Figure 3.3 Conceptual Diagram of the Procedural Scheme 123
Figure 4.3 Funeral of a baby girl who died from *moto* 134
Figure 5.3 Veracruceño youth during El Día de la Santa Cruz 136
Figure 1.6 Cover of the publication of Memorias 276

List of Tables

Table 1.2 Health indicators chart 49
Table 1.4 Who is and who is not an Indigenous person 158
Table 1.5 Veracruceño healers 203
Table 2.5 The 100 most common illnesses in Veracruz 211
Table 3.5 Reasons people claim motivated them to visit curanderos/brujos 219

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Thesis Statement

The people of Veracruz del Zapotal, or Veracruceños[1], as they call themselves, are a Spanish speaking Indigenous community of Nahua descent from the pacific region of Rivas, Nicaragua. Living among an overwhelming presence of *mestizo* (people of mixed Indigenous and European descent) culture and faced with the social effects of globalization, Veracruceños emphasize their distinct Indigenous identity through a substantial array of cultural practices and strategies, which include the use of Indigenous medicine. This dissertation is about how Veracruceños use their Indigenous[2] medicine as a strategy to claim ethnic identity. The term *medicine* in the context of this dissertation refers to a system of "beliefs and practices that are consciously directed at promoting health and alleviating disease" (Baer et al. 2003:8). In the same context, the term *health* refers to the harmonic coexistence of the human being with the environment, with himself/herself and with others, and geared towards a holistic well-being, filled with individual, social and spiritual tranquility, as it is defined by Indigenous people in Nicaragua, and in Latin America (Segunda Reunión de la Comisión de Salud Indígena, Managua 1996).

From this perspective, it will be evident how medical experiences, such as *illness*, *healing* and *being healed* are essential cultural and ontological factors that provide a feedback into a local and constant process of identity formation in Veracruz. In the past, Veracruceños' ideas of ethnic membership have rested on the concepts of biological descent and territoriality. However, as part of a national trend in Indigenous Nicaragua, since the early 1990s Veracruceños have been consciously using Indigenous medicine as a new strategy to reaffirm their collective Nahua identity.

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[1] The term *Veracruceños* only denotes the place of origin and residence, not ethnic membership. Thus, the Nahua people from Veracruz are called Veracruceños, but the Nahua people from Nacimí, a nearby Indigenous town, are called Naciméños or Nacimíes.

[2] Through the entire dissertation, I use the capital "I" when referring to the Indigenous people. Toward the end in this chapter, I give a detailed explanation of the why this is the case.

During the ethnographic research I conducted in Veracruz del Zapotal (henceforth referred to as Veracruz) between September 2001 and December 2003, it became evident that, in addition to the immediate medical benefits, Veracruceños also use medicine for *non-medical* purposes. Because there seems to be more than one way in which medicine is used for non-medical purposes, I shall refer to all of them as the *extra-medical usages of medicine*. Perhaps some of the most important theoretical contributions in this respect have been made by Emily Martin (1987), Susan Sontag (1978) and Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Margaret Lock (1987), among others. They all have elucidated how medical beliefs and practices are also metaphors for social relations. This literature makes it clear that, beyond the immediate and strictly medical benefits and functions, medical systems serve non-medical purposes. Furthermore, medical anthropologists have demonstrated that medicine or medical systems are more than the sum of diagnosing, treating, healing and understanding the complexity of illnesses and their respective remedies. Baer et al. (2003), Banerji (1984), Crandon-Malamud (1991), Elling (1981), Scheper-Hughes (1992), and Unschuld (1975), among many others, have illustrated how there are social and cultural instances in which medical pluralism, or medicine in general, is not driven solely by medical reasons but for political ones. Medicine, as a primary resource (Unschuld 1975), is utilized to get access to secondary resources, particularly where multiple resources exist and choices between them become socially and politically significant. Crandon-Malamud also found that among the Aymara in Bolivia, class and ethnic boundaries are redefined and negotiated as people talk about medicine. She shows that in the broader scheme of things, health is the main benefit medicine can obtain for the sick, but that, however, they are not the only beneficiaries. "Through medicine, physicians acquire economic power and prestige, and insurance and pharmaceutical accompanies accumulate capital" (Crandon-Malamud 1991: ix). Of course, this analysis suggests Foucault's (1973) work on medicine as a tool for social and political control.

The extra-medical usages of medicine are of interest within the field of medical anthropology. In particular, the ways in which members of a community direct their medical behaviour, articulate their medical ideas, and organize their medical resources for non-medical purposes, are significant to a broad spectrum of medical anthropology (Baer et al. 2003). An ethnographic study of Veracruceños offers a unique opportunity to understand how medicine is implicated in a broader sphere of social and cultural process regarding identity formation. In taking an interpretive approach in this ethnographic study, I ask how and why medical beliefs and practices constitute a strategy for both the internal construction and the external recognition of the collective identity of Nicaraguan Indigenous people and, in particular that of Veracruceños. In light of this question, I look at the role of medicine in the process of ethnic boundary formation (Crandon-Malamud 1997), and how it is articulated in Veracruz. Particularly, I am interested in examining under what circumstances seemingly dormant medical symbols and meanings acquire revitalized value and political significance.

As shown in this thesis, medicine for Veracruceños is fundamentally ontological in the sense that it emerges from and represents a powerful sense of realness. In Veracruz, medical experiences are regarded as natural because they accompany people from birth to death and define the quality of their lives. While these ideas and practices appear to be ordinary and natural to Veracruceños, from an anthropological perspective, they are evidently components of a cultural organization of illness experience within a particular social context. The data obtained from this research shows how Indigenous medical beliefs and practices, both as symbolic and pragmatic experiences, constitute *primordial* attachments for Veracruceños. I discuss this idea in further detail, below. Here I am using the term *primordial* in allusion to the "*primordial*" as opposed to the *circumstantialist* or *constructivist* model of ethnicity (Geertz 1963; Gil-White 1999; Isaacs 1975; Stack 1986; Grosby 1994; Shils 1957). As pointed by Gil-White (1999:802), primordial ascription is not really a matter of rational choice, but one of tradition and the emotions evoked by perceptions of common ancestry. In many instances, primordial attachments involve aspects of human experience that are profoundly embodied rather than rationally calculative. As social agents, through their *habitus*[3] or socially acquired, embodied systems of dispositions and/or predispositions (Bourdieu 1998:6)[4], ordinary Veracruceños act upon medical experiences without having to consciously think about it. In this way, such experiences lend themselves to be perceived by Veracruceños as ontological links to their sense of selves, which is embedded in a distinct identity and history. It seems to me that there is an important connection between language and habitus because it is through "*performative discourse*" -utterances that produce in themselves the act or the reality they name- (Bourdieu 1991), that Veracruceños culturally reproduce their Indigenous identity in, and through the use of, medical categories and practices. In other words, the embodied character of those experiences is made intelligible through language and social action

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[3] The original Latin term *habitus* refers to a condition of the body, but also character, quality: style of dress, attire, disposition, state of feeling and habit.

[4] For a discussion of similar ideas, see Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1995; and Polanyi 1958.

For these reasons, the use of Indigenous medicine seems to provide a viable approach for the creation and recognition of ethnic identity among Veracruceños. As it will be shown, Indigenous medicine both shapes and reflects the Veracruceños' historical and contemporary sense of the certainty of their culture. If people's use of medicine is reduced to an analysis of how the ideas of illness and healing are formed and represented in medical configurations, or transmitted from one person to another, something vital has been abstracted away: the people themselves[5]. People embody the experience of illness and create medical meanings and interpretations of the experiences, as well as the remedies for these illnesses, and do so with the precepts of a particular culture. In this sense, Veracruceños' Indigenous medicine reflects and reproduces a distinct cultural mode of feeling, thinking and behaving, i.e. a habitus, which is perceived by Veracruceños as intrinsic as are their notion of ethnic identity. As is demonstrated in this dissertation, identity in Veracruz is inherent to the experience of illness and the process of healing simply because the cultural preferences that surround health and illness are also key markers of identity.

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[5] Here I am paraphrasing an argument originally made by Joseph (2002) in a linguistic context.

Framing the research question

Although Veracruceños claim to be fully aware of their inherent Indigenous condition, they continue to construct and to seek recognition for their Indigenous identity for a number of practical reasons. First, being nationally and internationally recognized as an Indigenous people enables them to have rights to a territory, a particular way of life, a degree of political autonomy, and a social basis for historical and cultural pride. Second, traditional Indigenous signifiers for identity are being threatened by non-Indigenous structures of power, foreign values and globalization, as well as by an overwhelming national mestizo culture. Third, Indigenous identity is a source of collective self-esteem and group unity, which are essential elements for group survival and continuity. Finally, because they feel that by referring to them as *Indígenas en transición* (Indigenous in transition; a euphemism for a dying society), Nicaraguan mestizos deny them their inalienable right to a collective and distinct identity. Veracruceños consider this a serious threat to their social existence as well as an insult to their ancestors and historical memory. For most Veracruceños and particularly for culturally conservative leaders, the term Indígena is not just a nominal description of who they are; it is the most emblematic manifestation of their history, territory, kinship, and a destiny, to which they are all bound by virtue of sharing a common ancestor, and hence a distinct group identity.

Although the community of Veracruz was granted legal Indigenous status by the Nicaraguan government in 1915, not all Nicaraguan mestizos regard Veracruceños as legitimate Indigenous people. When I asked members of the community why they thought this was the case, most responded by saying that, "unlike in other Indigenous societies in Nicaragua, in Veracruz one will not find the kind of visual and stereotypical signs of Indigeneity that people expected to see in an Indigenous community" (Esban Gonzáles., prominent youth and university educated leader). In effect, their language and dress, along with many other customs, are indistinguishable from most Nicaraguans. However, Veracruceños claim that their Indigenous identity is marked by their genealogy, which directly identifies them as being Nahua descendants; by individual and social sentiments that are intimately tied to their land and history; and by their unique Indigenous institutions and customs, including their healing traditions.

Since the arrival of the Spanish conquistadors in Nicaragua in 1522, and the subsequent colonization of most of its native populations, Indigenous people in this country have struggled to remain culturally distinct and to maintain a sense of identity. Even in the face of the historical political-economic disparities they have experienced and continue to experience because of colonialism, civil war, and globalization, Indigenous people in Nicaragua strive to fulfill their goals of self-determination and autonomy. The story of Indigenous people's struggles is in general courageous, longstanding and painful, plagued with disease, war, genocide, torture, slavery, cultural destruction and political and economic marginalization (Crosby 1986; Las Casas 1957; Galeano 1982; Newson 1987; Sherman 1979; Whisnant 1995). This painful past has paradoxically helped them embody their identities as a continuous and dynamic process. Today, "Indigenous peoples derive much of their identity from histories of state-sponsored genocide, forced settlement, relocation, political marginalization, and various formal attempts at cultural destruction" (Niezen 2003:5). Despite historical and contemporary efforts to assimilate Indigenous people into the mainstream societies of their respective countries, Indigenous people continue to resist those attempts through several means (Churchill 1996; Collier 1994; Graymorning 2004; Gray 1997; Gosner 1996).

Furthermore, as pointed out by Scupin (2003:2), we are currently living in societies that are increasingly becoming more global and living with widespread contact among peoples of different ethnic backgrounds and cultures. Globalization has manifested itself in the expansion and interlinking of the world's economy through the spread of market capitalism, communications technology, industrialization and the many consequences associated with these occurrences. Societies that may have been homogeneous in the past are now concerned with the vulnerability of their shifting identities. The Indigenous people of Nicaragua, like many other Indigenous people in the world, are now being faced with some of the detrimental consequences of globalization, which not only affect their livelihood, but also the integrity of their cultural identity. Paradoxically, identity as an object of cultural differentiation gains currency in this milieu (Dr. Christopher Fletcher personal communication). For example, Friedman (1994) explores the interface between global processes, identity formation and the production of culture, and suggests that cultural fragmentation and modernist homogenization are equally constitutive trends of global reality.

The cultural boundaries that historically distinguished group identity, on the basis of biological descent, are slowly becoming increasingly indistinguishable in Veracruz. As new cultural elements, such as exogamy, mestizo and global capitalist values permeate Veracruceño ethnic membership, old signifiers of identity become increasingly precarious, and the need for clarifying ethnic boundaries takes urgency. For Veracruceños, their Indigenous identity has both symbolic and pragmatic meaning. Their need to preserve it is illustrated by their current struggle to survive as an Indigenous people.

Central concepts and concerns

Prior to presenting my research, I will define some central concepts used throughout this dissertation, and address some concerns.

Writing conventions: The only real names in this dissertation are those of central figures that appear in historical documents and oral history. However, no detail, context or form of any of the ethnographic situations I describe here, have been altered in any way. Veracruceños want to make public their social conditions, crisis and struggle for survival and Indigenous identity, and believe this is a great opportunity to do so. Direct statements from my cultural informants are written in *italics* so that they can be easily distinguished from other statements. Fictitious names substitute cultural informants' real names. Only a brief and general description of each of them is provided in this chapter, since a detailed portrayal could jeopardize their anonymity. Issues of cultural consultants' anonymity are discussed in chapter III.

All the statistical information about Veracruz, unless indicated otherwise, is original and was personally collected for this study during an extensive survey[6]. All translations from Spanish into English, unless indicated otherwise, are my translations.

The central concepts I want to define are: *Indigenous, medicine, medical system and medical experiences, beliefs, ethnicity, ethnie* and *culturally conservative leaders.* Other terms will be defined in the text as need arises.

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[6] Later in the methodological chapter, I give more details about the survey.

Indigenous people as opposed to Indians: Throughout the text, I use the term "Indigenous" with a capital "I", to refer to Veracruceños and other so-called "Indian" people for the following reasons. First, Veracruceños abhor the term "*Indios*", Spanish for Indian, and prefer to call themselves "*Indígenas*", Spanish for Indigenous. Second, Veracruceños and most Indigenous people in Nicaragua find the term "Indios" pejorative and view it as a sad anachronistic misnomer. However, instead of using the lowercase "i" for Indigenous, I have chosen to use the capital "I" to make a distinction between Indigenous, meaning "local" or "home-grown", and Indigenous peoples in general. Stephen Greymorning (2004) makes a similar argument about the erroneously over-used term "Indian" to designate Indigenous or Native people and chooses to use uppercase "I" in Indigenous when referring to a particular people. This is by no means a recent trend. Since the 1970's, many small-scale cultures in Nicaragua, as well as in other parts of the world, gradually started to adopt the term "Indigenous" as a self-designation used when presenting their claims in international forums such as the United Nations. Currently, the term "Indigenous", as argued by Niezen, "is not only a legal category and an analytical concept but also an expression of identity, a badge worn with pride, revealing something significant and personal about its wearer's collective attachments" (2003:3).

Medicine, medical system and medical experiences: In an effort to find a vocabulary that best describes my observations, I use the terms "medicine", "medical system" and "medical experience" interchangeably. Nevertheless, I consistently use them in light of a somewhat generic tendency in medical anthropology to refer to medicine as a "system of beliefs and practices that are consciously directed at promoting health and alleviating disease". I have here run the risk of being repetitious, for I have already defined this term at the beginning of this chapter. However, I consider it important to emphasize it since medicine is at the core of this study. Accordingly, by "medical experiences", I am referring to any socially constituted experience that is perceived, conceived, expressed, lived, feared, sought, or described within this particular context by the people of Veracruz.

The term **belief** in this dissertation is used to mean an organized set of ideas in acceptance of the truth of something. By no means is it used in opposition to what is believed to be *facts,* or in an asymmetrical relationship with what is conceived as scientific evidence. Since both traditional and scientific beliefs are social constructs, they are given equal anthropological status. Furthermore, it has been long established in the social sciences that the dichotomy between *facts* and *beliefs* is a false one (Favret-Saada 1980; Good 1994; 1980; Pouillon 1982).

In the context of this dissertation, I take the term **ethnicity** to be a concept based on the perception and beliefs of a share cultural heritage. i.e., share common history, culture or ancestry.

Ethnies: Gil-White (2001:540) argues that so-called "ethnic groups" are collections of people with a common cultural identity, and an ideology of membership by descent and normative endogamy. Therefore, the "group" in "ethnic group" is a misnomer because "ethnic groups" are not "groups" but *categories* people make about themselves and others. In this regard, he proposes to call them "ethnies". Following Gil-White, I describe the people of Veracruz as an ethnie instead of an ethnic group. This terminology fits well with the field site as well. A similar distinction is made in Spanish between *una etnia* (an ethnie) and *un grupo étnico* (an ethnic group).

The mestizo culture: Although, originally the term *mestizo* designated the offspring of a Spaniard and a Native American, it is now generally applied to an individual who speaks Spanish and observes cultural norms of Hispanic origin. In Nicaragua mestizos can be white, non-white, of European and Indigenous decent, or even of mestizo and Indigenous decent. Mestizos constitute the dominant national culture in Nicaragua. For Veracruceños the mestizo culture represents the biggest threat to their Indigenous identity.

Culturally Conservative Leaders: This term is used to describe a particular category of people encountered at the site of my fieldwork. Ten men and two women constitute the core of this group. They can be characterized by an unconcealed political and cultural "militancy" in attempting to maintain and vitalize their community Indigenous identity. They consciously promote ethnic endogamy, local cultural and historical values, rituals, and traditions as a way of resisting what they call "an engulfing mestizo culture". Most of them are well versed in national and international politics, Indigenous rights, and issues of globalization. In the past, some of them have served as leaders in important national and international Indigenous organizations. Nowadays, they continue to be active in the Nicaraguan Indigenous movements and the Parlamento Indígena de América.

As engaging and articulate orators, these people have elaborated beliefs that organize their knowledge about their history, struggles, and strategies to claim their Indigenous identity. Through rhetoric and political action over the past twelve years, an elite of culturally conservative leaders in Nicaragua has been promoting the idea that, beyond its obvious medical value, Indigenous medicine represents an important political, historical and primordial tool for demarcating and safeguarding a culturally distinct Indigenous identity. Members of the Veracruceño local elite occupy the most influential positions or roles in the important spheres of social and political life. As described by Shore and Nugent (2004:4), elites in general are typical incumbents: the leaders, rulers, and decision makers in any sector of society, or custodians of the machinery of policymaking. In this sense, members of the culturally conservative elite in Veracruz are the 'makers' and 'shakers', as their decisions crucially shape what happens in the community. Below, I list some biographical information about the most prominent culturally conservative leaders in the community. The information I provide here corresponds to the period of my fieldwork.

Pedro Gonzáles, male, 50, agricultural worker, father of 4, married, is the most influential culturally conservative leader of the group, and former national coordinator for the Nicaraguan Indigenous Association in the late 90's. Presently, Pedro lives with his second wife and three children on the outskirts of the village.

Conchita Gonzáles, female, 39, mother of 4, community health worker and community administrator, is Pedro's youngest sister and the most outstanding culturally conservative leader among Veracruceño women.

Esban Gonzáles, male, 24, university student, is Pedro's oldest son and an important liaison with Indigenous leaders outside Veracruz, and a political activist.

Alfredo López, male, 39, bureaucratic facilitator, legal intermediary, father of 5, political, activist, is also a Protestant religious leader, but thinks that his Indigenous identity comes before any other social or religious identity.

Arturón Morales, male, 57, agricultural worker, is mainly involved in traditional and religious celebrations in the village. Arturón is the father of several children who live with their respective mothers. He lives with his mother as a single man, where they run a cantina and organize important religious festivities.

Alex Morales, male, 24, university student, former community president, is the oldest son of Arturón Morales and the most prominent youth leader in the community. Alex is also a political activist and works for an agricultural NGO in Rivas.

Martín Ulloa, male 57, agricultural worker, married, father of 5, lived most of his adolescent life in Managua and brought the first electric mill into the village in the late 1970's.

Mateo Mendoza, male, 55, agricultural worker, married, father of several children, is in charge of collecting payments for local drinking water.

Cipriano Martínez, male, 57, agricultural worker, married and father of 8 children, is the most respected healer in the village.

Felipe Urrútia, male, 60, agricultural worker, healer/bonesetter, married, father of seven, and former community president, is one of the most trusted, respected and charismatic community leaders.

Avelardo Carbonel, male, 60, agricultural worker, married, father of eight, is the most quiet of the group, but also an influential traditionalist leader.

Elvira Navarro, female, 48, homemaker, and cantina owner, is the only culturally conservative leader who had been heavily criticized in the community for supporting the local Catholic Church in matters concerning village autonomy in religious festivities.

Eliseo Palmar, male, 49, agricultural worker, married and father of four children, has been trained by biomedical personnel as a health promoter worker for the community.

Although all members of this group were born and raised in the community, some of them have also had the opportunity to travel and to be in contact with equally culturally conservative leaders in and outside Nicaragua. The letters *cc* will indicate *cultural consultants* in general, and *nicc* stands for non-Indigenous cultural consultants. However, the letters *ccl* will precede the fictitious names of all the culturally conservative leaders so that they can be identified when sharing their stories, opinions and ideas about the history, life and aspirations of the Veracruceños.

Literature review

Since this dissertation focuses on the extra-medical usages of medicine in relation to identity formation in Veracruz, a comprehensive understanding of the relevant literature is necessary in formulating an analysis of Veracruceños. By familiarizing myself with as many theoretical positions as possible, I have been able to determine the consistencies or inconsistencies that may appear in my analysis in relation to, and in the context of a wider theoretical spectrum.

Save a small article in a local cultural magazine (Nicarao Calí 1998) and a little section in a book (Rizo Zeledón 1992), there is virtually no literature on the Veracruceños, let alone any literature pertaining to issues regarding their Indigenous medicine and ethnicity. However, since Veracruz is a case study reflecting on how a group of Indigenous people uses medical ideas and practices to claim ethnic identity, I rely more on literature dealing with two main topics: the extra medical usages of medicine and on ethnic identity formation. Although not typically referred to as "the extra medical usages of medicine" as such, literature describing how medicine can be used for other purposes, rather than just medical, is abundant. As I already stated it in the first pages of this introduction, important theoretical contributions in this respect have been made by Martin (1987), Sontag (1978), and, Scheper-Hughes and Lock (1987), who show how medical ideas and practices are metaphors for social relations. Baer et al. (2003); Crandon-Malamud (1991); Banerji (1984); Elling (1981); Foucault (1973); Scheper-Hughes (1992); and Unschuld (1975), among many others, have examined biomedicine, as part of industrial capitalist culture, by thoroughly addressing its political economy.

Furthermore, it has been long established that medical systems are also multivocal and polysemantic schemes of ecological adaptation (McElroy and Townsend 1996), explanatory models for biological (and social) suffering (Kleinman 1978; and Good 1994), and mechanisms for social and economic control (Foucault 1973; Navarro 1976; Morsy 1979; Baer 1982). In this respect, their practical functions are clearly not restricted to medically related issues. The ramifications of medical systems are inserted in a variety of non-medical spheres that shape their medical nature into a political economy of health and illness, meaning and truth. This seems to be the case because (borrowing the model suggested by Taussig, 1980) medical realities are not based on the medical truth of being, but on the social being of medical truth. Thus, this dissertation regards medical beliefs and practices as a cultural configuration that informs and mediates human experience

(Baer et al. 2003; Good 1994; Kleinman et al.1995; Romanucci-Ross et al. 1997; Scheper-Hughes and Lock 1987; Taussig 1987; Young 1993).

Although I carried out most of my literature review prior to entering the field, I am also aware that a literature review is always an unfinished process. Thus, I continued to research and read during my fieldwork, and after it was completed. I spent six months after conducting my fieldwork at the University of California in Los Angeles, as a department research associate, under the supervision of the Department of Anthropology. I was mainly interested in using their library because it has an extensive collection of Latin American books, articles and journals. Then, I proceeded to review further literature upon coming back to Canada.

Theoretical Orientation

Since the main theoretical focus of this dissertation is on the relationship between medicine, as a primordial experience, and ethnic identity formation, I pay special attention to Barth's (1969) classical circumstantialist model and its subsequent revisions and combine them with more recent primordialist schemes. This is important because as the ethnographic evidence shows, Veracruceños' primordialist views on ethnicity are not in contradiction with circumstantialist models. Thus, in order to conduct a more comprehensive analysis of how Indigenous medicine is used, instrumentally, to signal ethnic identity by Veracruceños, two variables must examined. First, I look at how the outstanding differences between the "primordial" and "circumstantial" models of ethnicity are manifested in Veracruz; and second, what cognitive models underlie

Veracruceños' own ideas concerning the acquisition and transmission of ethnic status (Gil-White 1999, 2001; Hall 1990; Joseph 2004). At first glance, it may appear that Veracruceños fit the circumstantialist model of ethnicity. This model argues that ethnies are "constructed" by rational actors who calculate their objective interests and then make decisions concerning association and/or political mobilization with others (Gil-White 1999:790).

However, using Gil-White's (1999: 798) model of *Ethnic Transmission and Acquisition* as an important theoretical orientation of this dissertation, I will show how the situation in Veracruz contains much evidence in support of his theory. According to Gil-White (1999:789), ethnic cognition is at core primordialist, and ethnic actors' instrumental considerations, and by implication their behaviours, are conditioned and constrained by this primordialist core. Simply put, primordialists (Shils 1957; Geertz 1963; Isaacs 1975; Stack 1986; Grosby 1994) maintain that certain kinds of 'primordial' attachments are felt towards co-ethnics because of who they are *categorically* as co-biological descendants from a primary group, and not necessarily because of interaction with them. Tradition and the emotions evoked by perceptions of common ancestry override rational choice for ethnic membership (Gil-White 1999:802). As it is shown in this study, by using medicine as a marker of Indigeneity, Veracruceños are socially, and paradoxically, manipulating cultural resources to strengthen the biological essence they claim makes them Indigenous in the first place. My task here is to understand how Veracruceños can maintain an essentialist claim to an Indigenous identity, while at the same time having to socially construct *the essence*, which presumably determines their Indigeneity. Thus, by ethnographically correlating Veracruceños' actions and ideas about ethnic self-representation, I will demonstrate how and why Indigenous medicine, regarded as a primordial component of their culture, has become a signifier of, and currency for, the concept of ethnic identity in Veracruz as an essential component of their culture.

Comaroff (1996) argues that identities are not "things" but relations, and that; therefore, any attempt at a general definition of ethnicity is bound to fail. Originally proposed by Comaroff (1996), this theory has been termed as *relationalism* by Lewellen (2002), and is based on then idea that:

> Ethnicity has its historical origins in inequality. It is manifested in the minutiae of daily life, especially in encounters between the ethnic group and the dominant power in the nation. Once established, ethnicity takes on a powerful feeling tone, so that the group seems primordial; thus the sustaining character of the group may be come divorced from its origins, which will then be modified (Comaroff 1996, adapted by Lewellen 2002:108).

Taking into account that we cannot provide a general definition of ethnicity as an accomplished end point of a peoples' history, along with Hall (1990), I take the concept of identity to be a constant process of becoming. I understand the Veracruceño process of ethnic formation as something that is never completed, but always temporarily positioned within a particular context that needs to be imaginatively and adaptively interpreted by the people themselves (Hall 1990; Lewellen 2002). However, I also acknowledge, "ethnicity is manifested in the minutiae of daily life as it relates to an ethnic dominant power" as argued by Comaroff (1996) and Lewellen (2002). Based on the ethnographic data I collected, I will elucidate how and a why medical experiences constitute primordial experience for the Veracruceño people, and how that primordialist nature is a building block for ethnic identity formation in Veracruz.

Finally, using Bourdieu's (1998) model of habitus, I illustrate my argument about the relationship between cultural structure and human action, and how Indigenous medicine, as a "system of meanings" (see Geertz 1973), both act upon and are acted upon by Veracruceños' actions in a continuous dialog. In this way, their cultural system both shapes, as well is shaped by, individual actions, which include claiming a particular ethnic identity with Indigenous medicine. I will examine to what extent the *primordial quality* of Indigenous medicine in Veracruz stems, not only from the traditions and the emotions evoked by perceptions of common ancestry, but also (using Bourdieu's model) from the "ontological complicity" between the objective structures of the Veracruceño external world and the (subjective) internal complex of dispositions, which constitute their individual habituated practices (1981:304-17). Habitus, according to Bourdieu, is the embodied way in which we engage in the world: "a system of durable, transposable dispositions which functions as the generative basis of structured objectively unified practices" (Bourdieu, 1979: vii). Since Indigenous medicine is, above all, a social practice, the Veracruceño habitus constitutes the principle according to which Indigenous medicine is generated and organized. I take Indigenous medicine to be the process through which individual medical dispositions are acted upon and medical classifications -diagnosis, etiologies, sickness categories, medications, and treatments both physical and spiritual - socially validated and objectified in everyday life.

In general, however, I rely on a hermeneutical perspective to contextualize and interpret the Veracruceños' use of Indigenous medicine, as an embodied experience, to claim ethnic identity though language and social actions. In the 60's Ricoeur (1995), claimed that to properly study human reality, one has to combine phenomenological description with hermeneutic interpretation. From a hermeneutic perspective, "whatever is intelligible is accessible to us in and through language and all deployments of language call for interpretation". Consequently, "there is no self-understanding that is not mediated by signs, symbols, and texts; in the final analysis self-understanding coincides with the interpretation given to these mediating terms (Ricoeur in Blamey and Thompson 1991:15). Together with Rabinow (1977:5-6), I take Hermeneutic, from the Greek word *interpretation*, to mean "the comprehension of the self, by the detour of the comprehension of other", particularly a perfectly public self who is "thus a culturally mediated and historically situated self which finds itself in a continuously changing world of meaning". Thus, in part, my task is to make a hermeneutical interpretation of what for the Veracruceños appears to be embodied experiences that become intelligible to [the observer] through language and social actions.

Thesis Organization

After having presented my thesis statement, framed the research question, stated the research objectives, defined some central concepts and concerns, and briefly discussed relevant literature and the theoretical orientation of this dissertation, I now give a summary of the remaining six chapters.

Chapter II presents a brief account of contemporary Nicaragua and a detailed ethnographic description of the people and the village of Veracruz. The history of the Nahua people as the Veracruceños' ancestors is discussed in this chapter in order to reconstruct the historical continuation of the Veracruceños as Indigenous people from the Isthmus of Rivas. I particularly emphasize the Veracruceños' subjective interpretations of the objective and historical events they see as defining their Indigeneity. This chapter constitutes the particular historical background, which guides the main arguments of this dissertation.

The research procedure used to gather the primary data for the study is addressed in chapter III. I begin by addressing, in a reflexive fashion, my own social position as the ethnographer in the production of the text. Following that, I discuss issues of *why* and *how* I came to conduct the research in Nicaragua in general, and among the Veracruceño in particular. The quality, content and type of interviews and participant observation, as well as issues of translation and validation of data are also discussed in this chapter.

Since the research question is concerned with issues of ethnic identity, Chapter IV presents Veracruceños' definitions of group Indigenous ethnic identity. In particular, a theoretical discussion of the Veracruceños' primordialist views on ethnic identity is presented through direct ethnographic testimonies. The Veracruceños' general preoccupation with their Indigenous identity's vulnerability and gradual erosion as caused by the dominant mestizo culture is also discussed here as well. The general antagonism between mestizo culture and Indigenous people is not a unique problem in Nicaragua. Thus, I briefly discuss the origins of the mestizo people in the Americas in order to give a broader contextual frame to the relationship between Nicaraguan mestizos and Veracruceños.

A detailed description of *la medicina Indígena* or Indigenous medicine in Veracruz is presented in chapter V. A series of long ethnographic testimonies narrated by patients and healers provides a closer look at how people in Veracruz understand, use and relate to Indigenous medicine. Issues of witchcraft, as an essential component of an ancient and contemporary culture and ethnic identity, are also included.

Chapter VI presents a theoretical discussion of the political, social, cultural and historical circumstances that lead Veracruceño to use Indigenous medicine to *claim* and *affirm* the precariously kept ethnic identity in Veracruz. In this chapter, I also present my interpretation of why medicine, over any other cultural aspect, is used to reinvigorate Indigenous identity by Veracruceños. A particular reference to the Estelí Indigenous Medical Encounter of 1992 is made. This event officially created the strategy to claim ethnic identity with Indigenous medicine.

Finally, in chapter VII, I provide a general analysis of the dissertation's central argument by theoretically addressing issues of ethnic identity formation, self-representation, primordial attachments and the role of Indigenous medicine in linking these elements to contemporary Veracruceño ethnic identity. As the discussion unfolds, I draw some conclusions about the extra medical usages of medicine and its role in the process of ethic identity formation, as a key concept in this dissertation. Each chapter provides historical and contemporary information, as well as an analytical discussion that theoretically situates ethnographic data as it relates to the general argument of the dissertation.

In the end, I hope that this ethnographic research can contribute to the discourse on and the knowledge of, Indigenous identity in Nicaragua in general, and of Veracruceños in particular, with the aim of diminishing ethnic prejudice and tensions between them and the mestizo population. However, I also hope to make a contributing to medical anthropology and other disciplines interested in the political and economic variables of healing, the medical humanities, ethnic identity, and Indigenous cultural resistance.

CHAPTER II

ETHNOGRAPHIC SETTINGS AND HISTORY

Chapter Overview

This chapter is an ethnographic description of the people of Veracruz that contextualizes their historical, geographical, political, economic, social, and cultural particularities, as they relate to the objectives of the study. First, I situate the community within the larger Nicaraguan context. Background information about the country helps us better understand important aspects about the life and social circumstances of Veracruceños, which includes their political aspirations and struggles. The history of their struggle and the current strategies to claim their Indigenous identity intimately ties them to the contemporary political, economic and national conditions of Nicaragua that are largely influenced by the globalized world.

Next, I include a brief description of the people and of their lives in the village. I describe their basic institutions, social organization, subsistence, family structure, community government and authority, land tenure, as well as components of religion, education, communication, medicine, witchcraft, and other aspects of life.

Nicaragua

Located in Central America, between Costa Rica and Honduras, and bordering the Caribbean Sea and the Pacific Ocean, Nicaragua is the largest country in this region. Its national territory encompasses 129,494 square kilometers and a land area of approximately 120,254 square kilometers. With a total population of 5,128,517, ethnies are divided into 69% mestizo (mixed Indigenous with white), white defined as Caucasian physical appearance or Euro-American); 17% white; 9% black, and 5% Indigenous (Estadísticas nicaragüense 2002:3-7, Centro de Documentación de la Universidad Hispanoamericana, Rivas).

The majority of the black population is concentrated in the Atlantic region of the country. Mestizo, white, and Indigenous populations inhabit mainly the Pacific and Central areas. Although Spanish is the official language, other languages such as Miskito, Creole English, Mayangna, Garifuna, Rama, and Sumo are also spoken, particularly in the Northern Atlantic region. Theoretically, there is no official religion in Nicaragua, yet the current government maintains close ties with the Vatican and openly supports the Catholic Church; therefore, the most prominent religion today is Roman Catholicism. It is evident that there are some religious leaders that hold important positions in the Nicaraguan government.

Dating from 1926, the Assemblies of God is the largest of the rapidly expanding Pentecostal denominations. Once a stagnant population, Protestants have accelerated in numbers, going from 3% of the national population in 1965 to more than 20% in the 1990s. Presently, a coalition of several Evangelical churches has six elected members in the National Assembly.

Managua is the capital and largest city in Nicaragua. Fifteen departments and two autonomous regions constitute the political administration of the country. In alphabetical order, these departments are: Boaco, Carazo, Chinandega, Chontales, Estelí, Granada, Jinotega, León, Mardriz, Managua, Masaya, Matagalpa, Nueva Segovia, Rivas, and Río

San Juan. The two autonomous regions are *Región Autónoma del Atlántico Norte* (Autonomous Region from the North Atlantic) and *Región Autónoma del Atlántico Sur* (Autonomous Region from the South Atlantic), which are respectively referred to as *RAAN* and *RAAS.* Prior to the granting of their autonomy, both regions formed the single department of Zelaya. The national constitution of 1987 under the Sandinista government granted autonomy to the eastern 52% of the country, in order to preserve the language, land and cultures of the Indigenous peoples of the region, mainly Mayangna (Sumu), Rama, Miskito, Garifuna and Nicaraguan Caribs who speak Creole English (Acosta 1996; Estadísticas nicaragüense 2002:3-7, Centro de Documentación Universidad Hispanoamericana, Rivas., Nicaragua).

Political History

From its independence in 1821 until 1937, Liberal and Conservative elites (both constituted in two separate rightwing parties) alternately governed Nicaragua. From 1937 to 1979, members of the Somoza family were the supreme rulers, until a Marxist oriented popular uprising, led by the Sandinista National Liberation Front (*Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional*- FSLN), overthrew them and stayed in power for ten years. In 1990, the FSLN lost the presidential election to Violeta Barrios de Chamorro. Representing a wide coalition of political parties, which was formed by the UNO (National Opposition Unity), she became the first female president and in 1986, the UNO won a second term. In 2002, the Liberal party came to power, yet the Sandinistas continued to be the second strongest political force in the country as well as the official opposition. The Liberal party controls the National Assembly with forty-two members, followed by the Sandinista with thirty-eight. The *Azul y Blanco* (the Blue and White) caucus is the third political force and is comprised of Liberal dissidents. Finally, a coalition of evangelical churches called *Camino Cristiano* (the Christian Path), with three members on the National Assembly, represents the fourth political alternative in Nicaragua.

National Government

There are four branches of the Nicaraguan government: the elected president, an elected unicameral National Assembly, a Supreme Court and Supreme Electoral Council. The Supreme Court is composed of sixteen magistrates who are elected for a five-year term by a sixty percent majority of National Assembly members. The National Assembly elects the Supreme Electoral Council, which is composed of seven magistrates who also serve a five-year term. Presently, the Liberal Party (PLC) and the FSLN dominate the political landscape and hold most of the ninety-two seats in the National Assembly. National elections for the president and for all members of the National Assembly are held every five years, while municipal elections are held nationwide every four years.

Economy

Agriculture employs about forty-five percent of the workforce and accounts for approximately twenty-five percent of the gross national product. The chief commercial crops are coffee, cotton, and sugarcane, these together with meat, are Nicaragua's largest exports while timber, gold, and seafood are also exported (Centro de Documentación Universidad Hispanoamericana, Rivas). The principal manufactured goods are chemicals, textiles, and processed foods. Neoliberal economic ideology, through the justification of free market relations, has led to an increase of the inequality between the wealthy and the poor. Most of the poor families rely on agriculture or resort to informal activities such as street vending to earn a living (Source: Estadísticas nicaragüense 2002:3-7, Centro de Documentación Universidad Hispanoamerciana, Rivas).

While the overall poverty levels show a marginal decline, population growth has resulted in a net increase in the number of poor. Out of a population of 5.2 million, 4 million Nicaraguans live on less than two dollars a day. Education opportunities are strongly correlated with economic well-being. One out of every two children drops out of school before completing the fifth grade. One of every three Nicaraguan adults cannot read or write. Nicaragua continues to have a high child mortality rate, which is related to malnutrition, poor sanitary conditions, and the inaccessibility of healthcare. One out of every twenty-two children dies before reaching the age of five. Three out of ten Nicaraguans suffer from malnutrition and about fifty percent of the entire population does not have access to the most essential medicines. Building in Nicaragua has been sporadic, resulting in poor housing conditions. Over one million Nicaraguans do not have a home. Of the Nicaraguans that do have a home, approximately fifty percent of them live in overcrowded conditions. Two out of every five existing housing units are constructed out of scrap and impermanent materials (Mayorga Espinoza 2001; Human Development Report 2002, United Nations Development Program; The Economist Intelligence Unit, September 2002; Estadísticas nicaragüense 2002:3-7, Centro de Documentación Universidad Universidad Hispanoamericana, Rivas).

Although the national currency is the córdoba, many businesses operate with U.S. dollars. Services such as cable TV, cellular communications, car renting, housing, hotels and private hospital use, must be paid in U.S. dollars or in the constantly changing equivalent of córdobas. The United States is Nicaragua's largest single trading partner being the source of twenty-seven percent of the country's imports and the destination of about thirty-three percent of its exports. About twenty-five totally or partially owned subsidiaries of U.S. companies operate in Nicaragua, including those involved with oil refining, electric generation, apparel manufacturing, and seafood.

People who left Nicaragua to escape from poverty and war in the 1980s are now making an important contribution to the national economy. According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), in 2001 Nicaragua received 335.7 million U.S. dollars from remittances sent by Nicaraguans abroad, particularly from those currently living in the United Sates. Nevertheless, Nicaragua is still one of the hemisphere's poorest countries, facing problems such as low per capita income, massive unemployment, and huge external debt. The distribution of income in Nicaragua is one of the most unequal distributions of the world. While the country has made progress toward macroeconomic stability over the past few years, GDP annual growth of 1.5% - 2.5% has been far too low to meet the country's need. While overall poverty levels show marginal decline, the population growth has resulted in a net increase in the number of poor (Estadísticas nicaragüense 2002:3-7, Centro de Documentación Universidad Hispanoamerciana).

Now that we have a better understanding of current conditions of Nicaragua, let us take a closer look into the life of Veracruceños to understand their place in the greater Nicaraguan context. Figure 1.2 indicates the exact geographical location of Veracruz del Zapotal in Nicaragua, and in Central America.

A BRIEF AND GENERAL DESCRIPTION PEOPLE AND THE VILLAGE

The Community

Currently figuring approximately 3,500, Veracruceños inhabit the Veracruz del Zapotal valley and the mountain region between the rivers of *El Camarón*, *Guachipilín* and *Rio Grande* in the department of Rivas, in Southern Nicaragua. This Indigenous community is composed of a small urban core called Veracruz, which functions as the administrative centre for five peripheral *comarcas* (comarca is a term designated to a given territory or district). In Nicaragua, such areas are designated as ranches, coffee *fincas*, or natural features within the territory and are identified within a municipality or an urban core. Most historians agree that *comarcas* were, and continue to be, important political and geographic units in Central America, whose origins are in part due to the colonial hacienda heritage and to the rough mountain isolation of some of the districts. The comarcas located in Veracruz are: Los Horconcitos, Rio Grande, Guachipilín, Pedernal, and San Jacinto. Veracruz's average annual temperature ranges from 27ºC to 35ºC. It receives between 1,000 and 2,000 millimeters of rain per year. There is a noticeable dry season between November and mid May, while the rainy season occurs between June and September (Adapted from Newson 1987:43).

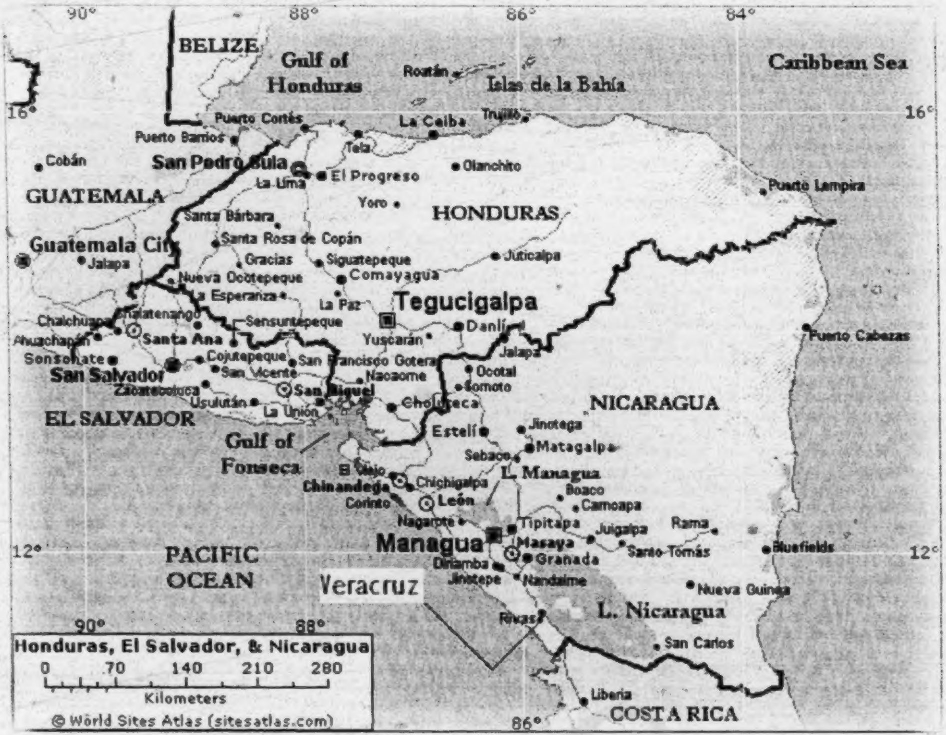
90°
88°
86°
84°
16°
12°
BELIZE
Gulf of Honduras
Roatán
Islas de la Bahía
Caribbean Sea
Puerto Cortés
La Ceiba
Trujillo
Puerto Barrios
Tela
Cobán
San Pedro Sula
El Progreso
Olanchito
La Lima
Puerto Lempira
GUATEMALA
Yoro
HONDURAS
Santa Bárbara
Santa Rosa de Copán
Guatemala City
Jalapa
Gracias
Siguatepeque
Juticalpa
Nueva Ocotepeque
Comayagua
La Esperanza
La Paz
Tegucigalpa
Chalchuapa
Chalatenango
Sensuntepeque
Danlí
Ahuachapán
Santa Ana
Yuscarán
Puerto Cabezas
Sonsonate
Cojutepeque
San Francisco Gotera
Jalapa
San Salvador
San Vicente
Nacaome
Ocotal
Zacatecoluca
San Miguel
Somoto
Usulután
La Unión
Choluteca
NICARAGUA
EL SALVADOR
Jinotega
Gulf of Fonseca
Estelí
Matagalpa
Viejo
Sebaco
Chinandega
Chichigalpa
L. Managua
Corinto
León
Boaco
Camoapa
Nagarote
Tipitapa
Juigalpa
Rama
PACIFIC OCEAN
Managua
Masaya
Granada
Santo Tomás
Bluefields
Diriamba
Jinotepe
Nandaime
Veracruz
Nueva Guinea
Rivas
L. Nicaragua
San Carlos
Liberia
COSTA RICA
Honduras, El Salvador, & Nicaragua
0 70 140 210 280
Kilometers
© World Sites Atlas (sitesatlas.com)

Figure 1.2 Map of Central America showing Veracruz next to Rivas.

Traditionally, Veracruceños have lived in houses made of straw, wood or mud. However, with the aid of the Sandinista government in the 1980s, the community built a number of brick and concrete houses, including a government medical post and two state-run schools. Those who could not afford an all-brick and concrete house opted for the *minifalda* (mini-skirt) model, which is a combination of wood, brick and concrete. The brick and concrete housing trend continued throughout the 1990s. In 1998, all the streets in the small urban core were covered with paving stones. It is publicly known that a cabinet minister, whose parents were born in Veracruz, helped to finance all of these public works with government funds. Although it seemed that the government was helping the village, Veracruceños claim that these works were largely facilitated through the family history and shared Indigeneity between the cabinet minister and the community.

There are no two-story buildings in the community, with the exception of a single wooden house found on the main-street in Veracruz. The remaining *comarcas* consist of scattered and colourful houses made of wood, brick or mud, built on foothills, or aligned along the main dirt road that connects the community with the towns of Rivas and Tola.

People and Territory

Veracruceños make a categorical distinction between *el pueblo y el territorio* (the people and the territory). "El pueblo" refers to all of the members of the Indigenous community living both in and outside the legally owned Indigenous territory. "El territorio" refers only to the land that the community legally possesses. Not all members of the Indigenous community live within the collectively owned Indigenous territory, which Veracruceños legally purchased in 1860.

The distinction between the people and the territory is important for Veracruceños because it is often thought by outsiders that only the individuals living within the Indigenous territory are Indigenous people. According to Veracruceños, this is a serious problem because it mistakenly excludes Indigenous people living outside Indigenous property, particularly those from the comarcas of San Jacinto and Los Horconcitos. The issue of territorial exclusion is rooted in a fraudulent demarcation that took place in the late nineteenth century, which excluded former Indigenous areas from land that was purchased by the community.

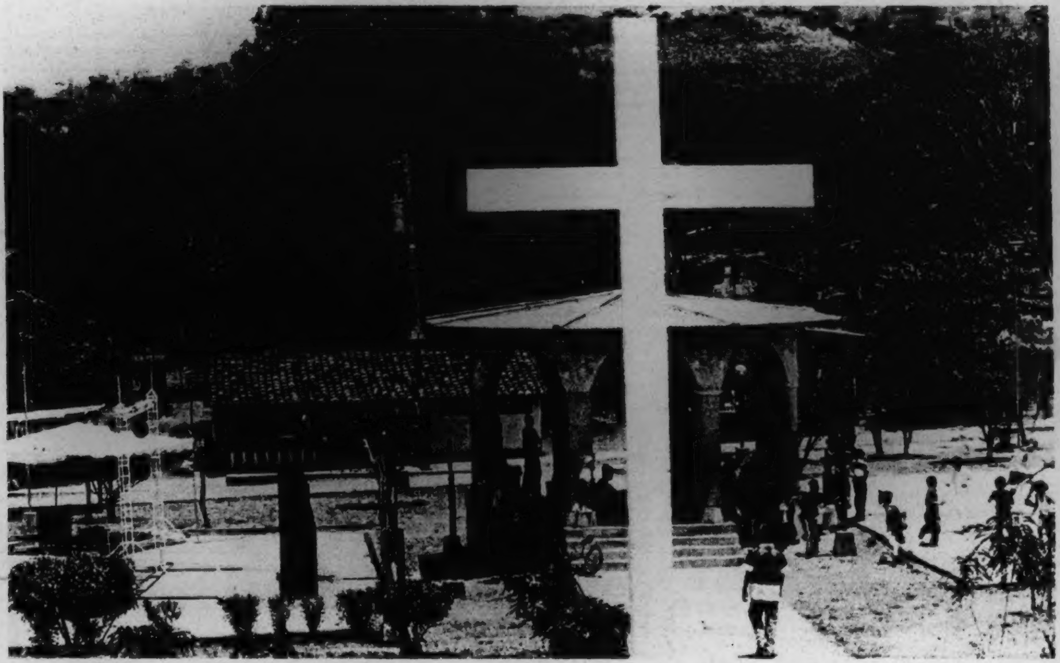

Figure 2.2 Main plaza in Veracruz del Zapotal (2002).

Forty years ago, the problem increased when some members of the community, for different reasons, decided to purchase non-Indigenous land in nearby areas. Veracruceño leaders claim that this migration physically situates these people out of the Indigenous territory, but not outside Indigenous jurisdiction, culture and kinship ties. After many generations, all of the Indigenous families living outside Indigenous territory continue to display strong kinship ties as well as loyal political, economic, and social allegiances with the core community.

Land Tenure

Communal land is the most important feature of material patrimony for the community. For Veracruceños, their land is linked to their history, culture, subsistence, and sense of belonging. It is a symbol of Indigenous unity, continuity and pride, but also an objective feature of their identity. Both local and national laws protect the land rights of Veracruceños. According to Nicaraguan law, Indigenous communal lands cannot be sold, confiscated, taxed, expropriated, or subjected to any agrarian reform. Nicaraguan property laws represent Indigenous communal lands as being fundamentally different from municipal property or regular real estate. According to Veracruceños' by-laws, every member of the community nominally owns the piece of land where his/her dwelling is located. Movement within the territory is unrestricted; however, no one can cut a tree or make major alterations to the landscape without the approval of the community's authorities.

In theory, all members of the community communally use the remaining land for subsistence agricultural purposes 41% and commercial crops 59%. An annual fee of five córdobas (0.25 US dollars approximately) per acre must be paid to the community's administrators to be able to use the land for agricultural purposes. Individual use of communal land only gives people rights to the crops, not to the land itself. In recent years, unequal access to the arable land has instigated conflicts among some of the families. Some have been legally solved in the community, while others have escalated to occurrences of physical violence and witchcraft. Families with more human and economic resources tend to be able to rent more communal land than small families with less economic resources. In addition to agricultural usages, communal land in Veracruz is also used for grazing cattle as well as for hunting, gathering, and fishing. These activities are free of any form of taxation and community or national regulation. This traditional land tenure regime is one of the organizing social and cultural principles of the community, which Veracruceños consider essential for keeping a vibrant ethnic identity.

Marriage, Family Structure, and Domestic Organization:

In matters concerning marriage and family dwelling space, there is typically a strong preference for matrilocality during the early stages of a couple's life. However, depending on housing availability, most couples eventually organize their households in a neolocal fashion. Currently, thirty-seven percent of households in Veracruz can be categorized as being extended families, while sixty-three percent as nuclear families. Extended families are multi-generational and very often include grandchildren, uncles, grandparents, and cousins. Men are predominantly household heads whereas women become household heads only as single mothers, widowers, or when temporarily separated from their husbands due to labour migration, and in very rare cases, due to the husband's physical or mental incapacity.

For most men, fatherhood begins during their late teens; men past their fifties are no longer reproducing. The socially accepted reproductive age for women begins during their early teens and continues until their early forties. The ages for marriage or cohabitation do not necessarily correlate with the ages for parenting, as young single mothers and absent fathers are commonplace in the village. Most women marry during their late teens, while males during their early twenties. By overtly praising and supporting young mothers, Veracruceños demonstrate their high regard for maternity and fertility. Since the 1980s Veracruceño mothers have been reported to be increasingly seeking biomedical facilities in which to give birth; however, when the Sandinistas opened the first biomedical centre in the village, most deliveries were still taking place at home where traditional midwives perform their duties according to local tradition and medical practices. The biomedical center in the village is not equipped to assist deliveries. Veracruceño women must go to the Rivas hospital to give birth in a biomedical setting. Of all the births between 1903 and 2003, 80% have taken place in the village, 11% in the Rivas hospital, 7% in other places (mainly Managua), and 2% in Costa Rica.

The age demographics in Veracruz are: 22% children (newborn to age 12), 69% adults, which they divide between young (ages 13 to 30) and older adults (age 31 to 60), and 9% elderly (age 61 to 100). Women form the numerical majority at 53% and men are 47%. While 90% of villagers prefer endogamous marriages, only 10% prefer to marry outside of the community. Although monogamy is the marital norm, there is an implied tendency among males to practice illicit and clandestine polygamy and concubinage. It is rare for women to engage in multiple male-partnered relationships. Serial monogamy for both sexes is also rare. The majority of matrimonial unions are common law, sitting at 61%. Religious weddings are less predominant, mainly Catholic, and make up 24%. Only 15% are secular marriages.

Religion and Festivities

Catholicism is the leading religious denomination making up 82% of the population in Veracruz. Several denominations of Evangelical (Protestant), but principally Pentecostal churches, make up 12%. Only 6% of the population claim not to have a religion in the conventional sense, rather, they claim to be Indigenously spiritual and practice ancestral religious beliefs. The urban core has a full time Franciscan friar, and two part time Protestant ministers, who look after the other comarcas. Unlike a regular Catholic priest, a friar (from Old French *freer*, meaning brother) is not allowed to hear confessions and has less academic and theological training. Sunday Catholic masses and Saturday Protestant services take place weekly. Although not every Veracruceño goes to church every week, they all have a strong belief in divine power over human affairs. This is evident in the frequency with which they use of phrases such as "God willing" or "if it is God's desire" in discussions pertaining to future events and in daily activities.

In the 1990s, the community managed to build a relatively ornate Catholic Church, replacing the old one that was built in the 1930s. In 1998, a modern and comfortable community hall was built next to the church. That same year, the friar took it over and made it into a rectory. This incident was the cause of serious tensions between the community and the church, which lead to witchcraft accusations and general animosity between the Rivas clergy and the community. From that incident on, their relationship has been generally weak and ambivalent.

In recent years, two other Catholic churches have been added to the community, one in Rio Grande, built in 1998 and another in Los Horconcitos, built in 2002. In addition to these Catholic churches, there are five Protestant churches, three in Veracruz, one in Los Horconcitos and another in Rio Grande. Two of them are regular homes that work as improvised tabernacles during the religious services. Interestingly enough, the Pentecostal denomination reportedly has particular appeal to poor Veracruceño women, as it appears to advocate sobriety and responsible family behavior from men, more so than does the Catholic Church.

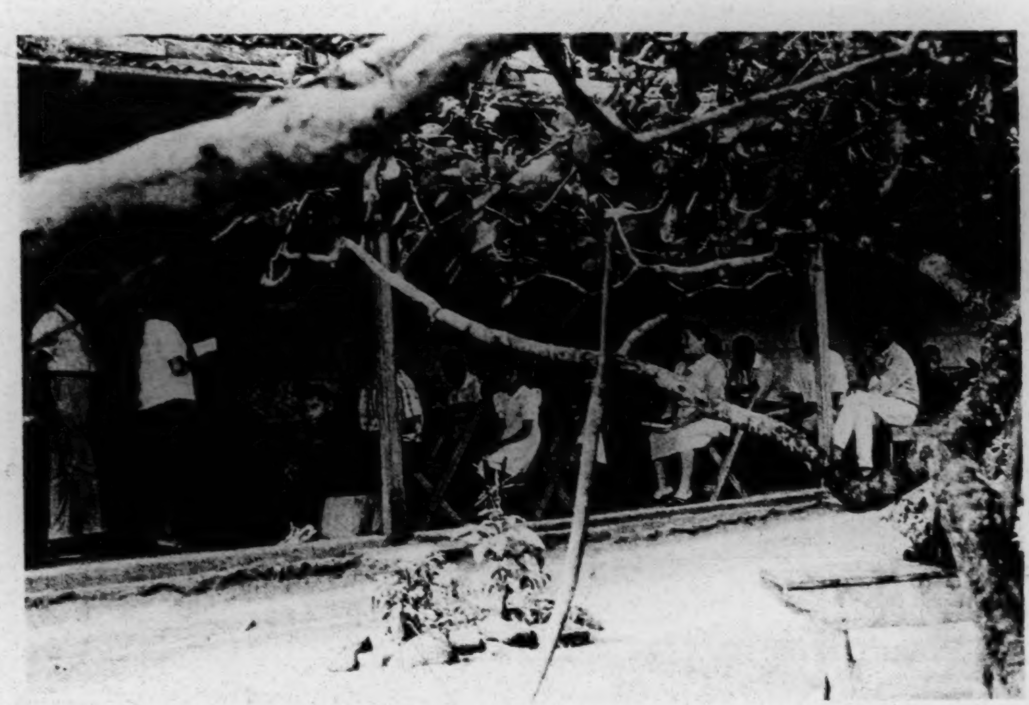

Figure 3.2 Pentecostal religious service in an improvised home-temple in Veracruz (2001).

Veracruceños celebrate several annual religious festivals. The most important are The Day of the Holy Cross, celebrated on May 3, and The Day of Our Lady of Saint Ana on July 25; both celebrations last two days. These religious festivities are a blend of religious and secular traditions. People go to mass in solemn processions, where colorful dancers wearing wooden carved masks on their faces synchronize the religious and secular traditions. During these celebrations, Veracruceños dance, drink traditional alcoholic beverages, and enjoy succulent banquets designed in a carnival fashion. Both celebrations require formal organization and months of preparation under the direction of a *Mayordomo* (a community-appointed steward), and a committee of helpers. Since these events are religious festivities, normally the community coordinates their planning with local clerical authorities. However, in the last three years, personal, religious, organizational, and political disputes between Indigenous leaders and the Rivas clergy have generated divisions and mutual animosity. Nevertheless, amid these disagreements and quarrels, the community has successfully kept the religious character and festive ambiance alive within the celebrations.

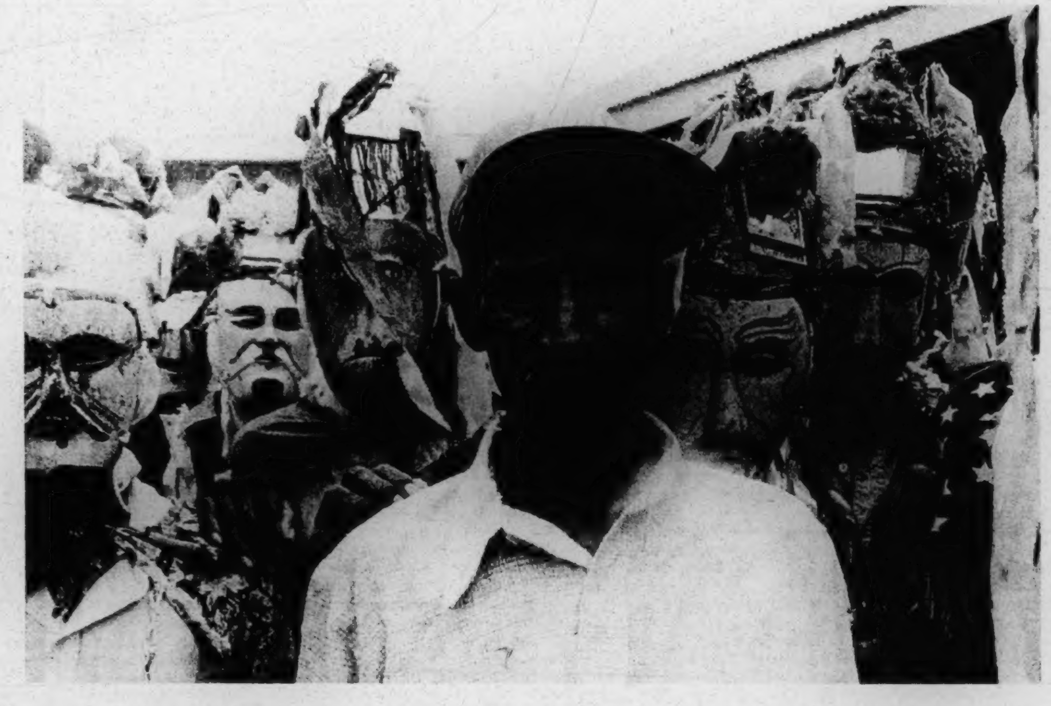

Figure 4.2 *The Guachipilín Devils* celebrating the Day of the Holy Cross (2002)

Making a Living

Veracruceños are primarily agriculturists, subsisting mainly on corn (37%), beans (36%), bananas (18%), *yuca* or casaba (5%), and rice (4%). They supplement their diet by fishing in nearby rivers and off the Pacific Coast, as well as by hunting and foraging in their Indigenous territory. Meat and a small local production of diary products are also essential to their diet. In addition to these activities, they do a small amount trade in the local market in Rivas, where cattle, goats, chickens and pigs as well as part of their crops are sold. In 2002, I calculated that Veracruz had at least 700 chickens, 172 head of cattle, 100 pigs, 20 horses, and 20 goats.

Women do most of the household work, while men perform the heavier agricultural tasks. This complementary labour mode is not a fixed arrangement, as both genders equally engage in domestic and agricultural undertakings when the need arises. Children are indispensable in regards to domestic and agricultural work. Some start helping around the house at the age of five. Their contribution is minor, but important as it initiates a way to playfully socialize them into the affairs of household obligations. Children older than ten learn to herd cattle and help with small agricultural responsibilities. Some children, particularly girls, work as door-to-door vendors with corn tortillas, baked-goods and other local treats. The majority of commercial agricultural production (90%) is sold or traded locally and regionally, only 10% of the commercial crop, principally *guineo cuadrado* (square banana), is exported to Costa Rica and El Salvador.

Approximately 80% of the work force is primarily dedicated to agriculture. The remaining 20% is divided among professionals, business people, and public or private employees working outside the village. Only 76% of the total population live and work in Veracruz, while 16% work in Costa Rica, and 8% elsewhere, primarily in Managua. It is more probable for men to commute, as there are fewer risks involved. According to some Veracruceños, women run the risk of being raped, enslaved as sexual workers, and even killed in unclear circumstances while in transit to Costa Rica or other places. Nicaraguan filmmakers Maria José Alvarez and Martha Clarissa Hernández (2002, personal communication) claim that most Nicaraguan migrants working in Costa Rica are employed as agricultural and domestic labourers[7].

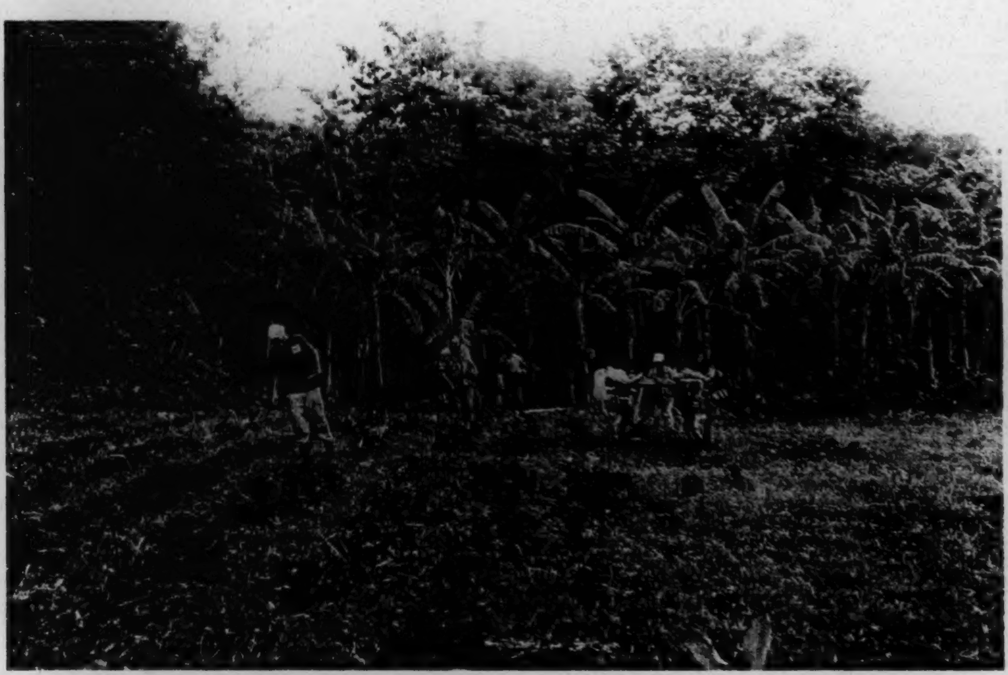

Figure 5.2 Indigenous people using traditional methods of plowing in Veracruz. A banana plantation is shown in the background (2002).

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[7] In 2002, Alvarez and Hernández produced a well-researched documentary on Nicaraguan migration to Costa Rica.

In addition to agricultural work, the production and trade of tortillas, cheese, tamales, meat and sweets helps to generate local employment. Approximately thirteen households produce edible goods for local trade. Eleven corner stores in the village dispense other supplies, such as canned and packaged food and other external products. The community also has one local butcher, five *guaro*-only (local rum) cantinas, four beer and rum outlets, two mills for grain, six locally and regionally recognized healers and four midwives, and three ostensibly secret sex workers.

Community Authority: El Monéxico and la Directiva

Members of *el Monéxico*, a local and traditional form of political authority, handle community and family quarrels, small claims and other minute issues of law and order. The Rivas police, in cooperation with Veracruceño community authorities, deal with serious disputes, legal faults and criminal offences. Other issues, such as communal administration, local taxes, general meetings, annual festivities, community justice, cooperation, and organization are under the jurisdiction of both la *Junta Directiva* (the community's Board of Directors) and the *Monéxico.* Although the Monéxico is a form of community government, national Nicaraguan authorities do not legally recognize it. Nevertheless, the Monéxico is the oldest and highest structure of community power and authority in Veracruz, and it rules *de facto.* In recent years, a renewed interest in revitalizing traditional forms of government has been gaining popularity among Indigenous communities in the Pacific and Central regions of Nicaragua. With the exception of a brief period of inactivity during the rule of the Sandinista government in the 1980s, the Monéxico in Veracruz has always been an encouraging example for other Indigenous communities in the region:

> *The Nahua monéxicos have a profound historic value. The monéxicos from Veracruz, Somoto, Madriz and Nueva Segovia are important examples for other Indigenous people to follow. Monéxicos make a tremendous contribution to our struggles for self-determination and for the revival and affirmation of the traditional forms of ancestral governments in Nicaragua* (*ccl.* Pedro Gonzáles).

Although in ancient Nahua history, the Monéxicos were subject to the authority of the *cacique*[8], Veracruceños claim that in its contemporary form in Veracruz, no decision has ever been made without the consent of all members of the Monéxico. Structurally, it is divided into several special work commissions, all of which, in principle, are subject to the community's General Assembly. Every male and female who is fourteen years or older, is considered a member of the General Assembly (See diagram in the Appendix 1).

La Directiva (Spanish for Board of Directors), as Veracruceños call it, is a form of local administrative authority that was imposed on the community in 1915 by the Nicaraguan government. However, for many Veracruceños, the formality and authority of la Directiva is only nominal. As mentioned above, real communal power continues to be in the hands of the Monéxico, which is composed of all the principal leaders in the community.

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[8] Arawakan word for chief, widely used in Central America for its Indigenous origin.

Figure 6.2 The author (first row on the right) with some members of the Monéxico (Photographed by Cecilia Guillén 2001).

For many years, members of la Directiva were appointed by government officials. However, during the last two decades members of la Directiva have been popularly elected by the General Assembly for a one-year period with the right to be re-elected for as many terms as possible. Usually members are elected on the basis of communal knowledge, public service, and attributes of intelligence, verbal eloquence, honorability, literacy, social prestige, and charisma. According to Veracruceños, any candidate must have at least three of these attributes. La Directiva and the Monéxico always work together. All members of la Directiva are members of the Monéxico, but not all members of the Monéxico are members of la Directiva. Former members of la Directiva automatically become members of the Monéxico even when they are no longer in office, but their membership at this time is voluntary. Presently, around forty-five men and women actively volunteer their time to deal with issues centered around identity, health, medicine, security, land, community justice, environment, development, children, youth, women, and the elderly.

Transportation and Communication

Bicycles, horses and walking are the most common forms of transportation used in Veracruz. There are only two automobiles in town and one motorcycle, all of which are privately owned. Taxis are sometimes available. An old and shaky bus runs four times a day between Rivas and Rio Grande, which is the best alternative for transporting both people and goods. The bus is essential for trade between Rivas and Veracruz and is also a fast and safe mode of transportation for students and workers who travel daily to Rivas. Active members of la Directiva are exempted from paying bus fare. Regular passengers pay six córdobas for a one-way trip (around $0.30 US), while students only pay four córdobas. Depending on the conditions of the road, a 4.5 km trip takes between 20-30 minutes. The road is muddy during the rainy season and dusty during the dry season. The driver stops anywhere a passenger wants to get on or off the bus. Since everybody knows each other in the community, enjoyable conversations routinely take place during the bumpy ride.

Figure 7.2 The friendly mestizo bus crew in Veracruz (2002).

For some Veracruceños, a trip to Rivas often breaks the monotony of village life and usually puts them in a good mood. Riding the bus, as opposed to walking, can somtie gives people higher status; they can afford motorized transportation.

One local public telephone and nineteen privately owned cellular phones provide another form of communication. Although no newspapers are sold in the village, occasionally few people in the community manage to obtain copies of La Prensa (The Press) or El Nuevo Diario (the New Daily). The former is an overtly affirmed right-wing newspaper, where as the latter offers a more central/left-wing perspective of national and international issues. Global knowledge is also transmitted through radio and television. Seventy percent of the families have a television set and through sharing, most people in the community watch an average of one and a half hours daily, mainly soap operas, musical shows, movies, as well as local and international news.

Health Care

Typically, most Veracruceños seem to rely on their own vernacular medical system for healthcare matters. In chapter V, I describe in more detail the character, content, and form of the Veracruceño medical system, which nowadays they call *la medicina Indígena*. Only in cases of emergencies or locally untreatable sickness, Veracruceños seek medical help outside the community in government-run medical facilities in Rivas or elsewhere. However, since the early 1980's when the first biomedical post opened in Veracruz, introduced by the Sandinista Revolution, many Veracruceños have started to frequent this clinic (See John Donahue 1986 for a thorough discussion of the Nicaraguan revolution in health).

In the 1980's and the beginning of the 1990's, two fulltime physicians and three nurses ran this medical post. As part of a comprehensive approach to health care, the medical post also helped in promoting health education, nutrition, sanitation, immunizations, family planning, maternal and child health education and to supply free medicines. In 1990, a new government came to power and many of the social programs introduced by the Sandinistas ended. Veracruz went from having the daily service of two physicians and three nurses to only one physician once a week, and two nurses who run the medical post 5 days a week only in the morning. Presently these nurses are in charge of pre-natal and natal education, minor medical check ups, immunizations, dispensing some medications (when available mainly, antibiotics and pain killers) and treating wounds.

Life expectancy at birth male/female	Male 67.9/ female 72.4 (years)
Healthy life expectancy at birth male/female	Male 59.7/ female 63.1 (years)
Child mortality m/f (per 1000)	Male 38/ female 32 (years)
Adult mortality m/f (per 1000)	Male 213/ female 143 (years)

Table 1.2 Health indicators chart (Source: WHO 2002).

According to local health professionals, the most common health problems in the village are malnutrition, parasites, diarrhea, and various infections among children; respiratory and heart conditions, hypertension and skin conditions among adults; and arthritis among women exacerbated by lifestyle of strenuous physical labour. Seasonal outbreaks of malaria and dengue fever are also serious health concerns in Veracruz. Furthermore, cancer, especially cervical and breast cancer, and diabetes are growing problems in the Village (Mario Sandoval 2002, personal communication).[9] All of the medical categories mentioned here correspond to the biomedical repertoire because many of the Indigenous illnesses are often scorned as nonsense by medical doctors and nurses. Therefore, Veracruceños prefer to go to see a local healer for the treatment of Indigenous illnesses, avoiding in this way discrimination at biomedical settings.

The International Red Cross has sporadically implemented health projects aimed at improving the health conditions of Veracruz and the region through health education, promotion and prevention activities, and by strengthening local capacities to respond to priority health needs. In general, Veracruceños have been very receptive to these kinds of program. Nevertheless, the majority of Veracruceños (70%) are, once again, chiefly relying on their vernacular medical systems. They have amalgamated elements of biomedicine, and of what in Nicaragua is called "popular" and "black medicine",[10] Nicaraguan botany, *bioenergetics*[11], and regional witchcraft into a single medical system. Although only few people are socially recognized as healers, medical knowledge is not exclusively held by these individuals. The majority of Veracruceños seem to have specialized knowledge about local remedies, medicinal plants, diagnostic procedures and treatments for many illnesses. They all value and share healing knowledge as part of their Indigenous heritage, and as a way of keeping the community healthy and united. The notion that everyone is a healer of a sort, and that the community at large maintains a repertoire of healing and treatment knowledge, is similar to what Young-Leslie (1999) found in Ha'ano in Tonga. "This has interesting ramifications in terms of diagnosis, and consequently power and authority of the healer/medical person. It is not a point often made, and it contradicts the usual model of medicine as a specialist practice" (2005, personal communication).

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[9] Mario Sandoval is a medical doctor who has worked extensively with the International Red Cross in rural Nicaragua, particularly in Rivas, as program director of several health projects.

Education

In comparison to the national average literacy rate of 68%, 76% of Veracruceños have the rudimentary knowledge of reading and writing; however, 22% are completely illiterate and only 2% have obtained some type of higher education, such as having attended university. Most Veracruceños attribute this achievement to the literacy campaigns run by the Sandinistas in the 1980s. The urban core in Veracruz has a school where students can study up to grade eleven. In addition to this school, there are two primary schools in the comarcas of the Rio Grande and Los Horconcitos. However, most children begin leaving school around grade four and only 12% of all students complete high school. Domestic labour needs and low educational incentives discourage adolescents from seeking higher education. With the exception of one teacher, who, according to Veracruceños, has been mesticized (made into a mestizo), all teachers are of mestizo origin. For many Veracruceños, this is a large disadvantage in regards to promoting their cultural patrimony and way of life. As it will be shown in later chapters, for some Veracruceños, mestizo teachers are a serious threat to the community's Indigenous identity and historical sense of worth.

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[10] The term "popular medicine" is used to designate all medical practices that are carried out in the domestic sphere, and whose origins are regarded as part of both urban and rural people. "Black medicine" is the term employed to designate medical practices of African origin, commonly found in the Atlantic coast of Nicaragua.

[11] Bioenergetics is a diagnostic method developed by a Japanese physician, Yoshiaki Omura, in 1978. The method was initially called "Bi-Digital" or "Ring-Test" (Fundación Comunidad del Hospital Natural de Nicaragua, 1993:29). Bioenergetics is based on the applications of an electro-magnetic field between the patient, the medicaments and the healers. Based on this technique, the healer seeks to detect the illness, its possible causes and its treatment.

Social Conflict, Harmony and Witchcraft

On the surface, life in the village is relatively peaceful, quiet, and harmonious. Neighboring communities generally regard Veracruceños as friendly, generous and hospitable people. However, as in every human society, social conflict, envy, treachery, and misfortune are also present. These problems manifest themselves in a variety of ways and people deal with them accordingly. Brujería or witchcraft is perhaps the most remarkable way in which conflict is expressed and tensions dealt with. Through witchcraft, social tensions can be made public or confined to the most recondite secrecy. Witchcraft is commonly found in rural Nicaragua, yet it first may seem that no one in

Veracruz has ever witnessed, carried out or suffered the consequences of witchcraft, that is, for obvious reasons no one seems to admit it to strangers. It was only after I became part of the daily social scenery of the village that I started to realize how important witchcraft is for Veracruceños as a mystical, medical, and social phenomenon. The realty of witchcraft is so pervasive in the community that it helps regulate social order, and allocate health and illness in the form of punishment and reward. As it will be evident in this ethnography, many of the internal conflicts that erupt in the community are encoded in the idiom of witchcraft. In many significant ways, this idiom bears essential aspects of local identity because, as part of the medical configuration, it has acquired the status of a *primordial* experience.

In many respects, having little social stratification based on material possessions, makes Veracruz a remarkably egalitarian society. This is an important social advantage, which contributes to minimizing community tensions. In addition, local leaders openly promote generosity, solidarity, goodwill, and community unity as ancestral Indigenous values. Their struggle for Indigenous subsistence and identity creates an effective, cohesive force that helps them maintain group unity in the face of economic, political, social, and ethnic adversity. Nevertheless, as it will be evident, witchcraft creates conflict but also promotes group unity by demarcating primordial aspects of ethnic identity. This is not a fortuitous process. As it will be shown, Veracruceños use witchcraft as a field to play out the political economy of fear and moral panic. Social dialectics of power expressed in witchcraft, are also essential local ingredients for some degree of social harmony. For Veracruceños witchcraft also operates as leveling device that enhances group unity by lessening differentials in wealth.

After this general survey of contemporary life in Veracruz, I will now proceed to put Veracruceños in a historical perspective. The following section aims at further contextualizing the current Veracruceño struggle for ethnic identity, and to consolidate through historical reconstruction their Indigenous history and ancestry, as they perceive it and speak about it.

PART II. VERACRUCEÑOS IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Section Overview

This section deals with two separate but interrelated issues. First, it briefly describes the history of the Nahua people (the ancestors of contemporary Nahua communities in the Isthmus of Rivas, particularly Veracruceños). Second, based on both historical documents and oral history, this section reconstructs the most salient historical events that Veracruceños regard as important markers of their struggle for Indigenous survival and identity. In order to maintain a broad historical context, in reference to Veracruceños, I have highlighted important aspects of the history of Indigenous Nicaragua in general. Nevertheless, the focus remains on the relevance these events have for Veracruceños and their struggle to remain as a distinct ethnic identity in Nicaragua. I end this chapter with a conclusion that sums up the importance of history in the construction of an Indigenous identity for Veracruceños.

Theoretically, this section provides a historical perspective of the Nahua people as the Veracruceños' ancestors. This is important for Veracruceños because they claim to be the descendents of the Nahua people, known as the Nicarao, who settled in the Isthmus of

Rivas. Although officially a mestizo society, the country derives its name from these people, in particular, from *Cacique* (Chief) *Nicaragua* who ruled over the Nicarao people during the time of the Spanish invasion. By focusing on the events that Veracruceños regard as being directly related to their struggle to persist as Indigenous people, I have carefully worked to understand their own vision of their history.

The history of the Nahua people is important for Veracruceños because, as part of their ancestry, it legitimizes their current affirmation and struggle of maintaining their Indigenous identity. It is through the collective historical continuity that the past becomes relevant to the contemporary Veracruceños. In this respect, both oral tradition and academic arguments that attempt to amalgamate Veracruceños' sentiments and perceptions of their history have been significant to this ethnographic research. Although some of the historical issues addressed here are not directly about Veracruceños, in the larger historical context, they are relevant, since Veracruceños are members of the larger Indigenous population of Nicaragua, and of the general population.

I begin with the arrival of the Nahua people around 500 BCE, moving through the Spanish conquest, colonial and postcolonial periods, and conclude with the late twentieth century, which marked a period Veracruceños ambivalently regard as "back to conservatism" and an era of "dramatic change" in the community. The general focus is centered on how these events characterize their history and shape the lives of the Indigenous people in Nicaragua today. Special emphasis is placed on the orally constructed history of the events that took place during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. These events and the narratives built around them are of outmost importance to

Veracruceños because they constitute the objective links to a past that legitimize their claims in the present.

The Ancient Nahua

According to Kaufman (1974), Nahua is one of twenty-seven languages belonging to the Uto-Aztecan language family. Uto-Aztecan languages are subdivided into eight groups: Plateau, Tubatulabal, Southern California, Hopi, Piman, Yaquian (Taracahitian), Coran, and Hahuan. As Campbell and Langacker (1978:86) have described, Nahua dialectology is notably complex, and lends itself to multiple misinterpretations. According to Swadesh, a phonetic distinction between /tl/, /l/, and /t/ was once regarded as the basis for identifying major dialectical chains or nets known as *Nahuatl, Nahual, or Nahuat* (in Fowler 1989:6). However, further studies demonstrated that this distinction has no classificatory value since /tl/, once thought to be a recent innovation in Classical Nahuatl (Whorf 1937 in Fowler 1989:7), has been reconstructed for Proto-Nahua (Campbell and Langacker in Fowler 1989:7). Furthermore, Campbell (1985) proposes a classificatory system in which Nahua consists of three "branches" or independent languages: Pochutec, Pipil of Central America, and Core Nahua, to which all other varieties belong (Fowler 1989:7).

Nahua Migration to Nicaragua

Migrations of Nahua groups from Mexico to Central America are perhaps some of the best-known examples of large-scale population movements of "New World" cultural history (Fowler 1989). Although the Pipil and Nicarao cultures of Central America both emerged from a common Proto-Nahua ancestral culture, entering Mesoamerica sometime around A.D. 500, they developed contrasting adaptations to their environments (Fowler 1989:11). In comparison to some of the older ethnic/linguistic groups of Mesoamerica, such as the Mayas, Mixe-Zoques, Zapotecas, and Mixtecs, Nahua-speaking groups are considered relatively late in arrival (Fowler 1989:32). All Nahua-speaking people in Central America were known as Pipil; however, a different term is used to identify descendents of late migration groups, namely the Nicarao Pipil or alternatively just Nicarao (Fowler 1989). The Nicarao people settled in Isthmus of Rivas (Healy 1980), and also inhabited the islands of Ometepe and Zapatera (Urtecho 1960:87). Their largest city was also their capital, called Quauhcapolca, situated near the city of Rivas. Other main cities included: Tecoatega, Totoaca, Mistega, Xoxoyta, and Papagayo. The number of inhabitants in each centre ranged from 100 to 20, 000 people. A cacique or chief ruled in every city or chiefdom with the advice of the Monéxico (Urtecho 1960:87-89).

The migration of the Nicarao to Central America has been reconstructed from oral traditions of Indigenous people, recorded by early chroniclers. In his *Monarquía Indiana*, Fray Juan de Torquemada provides a detailed account of the migration that was constructed from information collected from aged Indigenous informants (Newson 1987:31). In his *Historia General y Natural de las Indias*, Oviedo (1959) reports Friar Bobadilla's interviews with Nicarao people that took place in 1528. Some of these interviews provide important historical evidence of Pipil-Nicarao migration to Central America. The following excerpts are based on some of those interviews:

> We are not natives of these lands, and it was long time ago that our predecessors came here, and we do not remember how long ago because it was not in our time. The land from which our progenitors came is called Ticomega and Maguatega and it is toward where the sun sets; and they came because in that land they had masters whom they served, and [their masters] treated them badly (Oviedo y Valedés in Fowler 1989:32).

> [Our ancestors served their masters] as we now serve the Christian, and their masters kept them for these purposes and they ate them, and this why they left their houses out of fear; and their master had come from other lands, and they had subjugated them, because they were many, and for this reason they left their land (Oviedo y Valdés in Fowler 1989:32).

To clarify problems of interpretation, Fowler (1989) refers to the historical evidence recorded by chroniclers Bobadilla, Motolinía, and Torquemada regarding the Nicarao migration as indisputable. Sixteenth-century sources with references to the linguistic and cultural affinities between the Aztecs of Mexico and the Nahua-speaking groups of Central America are abundant (Fowler 1989). Thus, I conclude this section with two of the many excerpts found in related literature:

> ... and many marveled to see that Nicaragua is inhabited by Nahuales [Nahua speakers], which are of the same language as in Mexico (Motolinía in Benavente 1971:12).

The Spanish Conquest

As it has been eloquently put by Stanislawski (1983:11), historically, Nicaragua has been "a country fated for calamity. Earthquakes and volcanoes have geographically dramatized this fact but no other event was as catastrophic as was the conquest of the Europeans".

In 1519, exactly twenty-seven years after Columbus reached the so-called "New World" and seventeen years after he had sailed down the east coast of Central America, Spanish Conquistadors from Panama saw, for the first time, the Pacific side of Nicaragua (Stanislawski 1983:1). In 1522, Gil Gonzáles Dávila was supposedly the first Spanish explorer to make contact with the Nicarao. Nicaragua was then a thriving garden, but in the time of a little more than one generation, most of its population was gone (Stanislawski 1983). Prior to meeting Cacique Nicaragua, for ten days Gonzales visited with the Chorotega Cacique Nicoya, who informed him that fifty leagues to the north lay the town of the powerful Nicarao Cacique Nicaragua. It is reported that Cacique Nicaragua pleasantly welcomed Gonzalez and engaged him in a lengthy philosophical dialogue, which was recorded by the treasurer of the expedition, Andrés de Cereceda. The encounter took place in what is now the city of San Jorge, near the city of Rivas, in the department of the same name.

According to Wheelock (1974), official accounts of the first contact were highly manipulated. Wheelock argues that the overemphasis of the presumed dialogue between Cacique Nicaragua and the Spaniard Gil Gonzalez Dávila conceals the subsequent cruelty of colonization involving war, rape, and destruction. For the bourgeois historian, the new Indo-Hispanic history begins with a dialogue, a rather deceiving description of the actual event. Wheelock argues that the romanticized idea of a dialogue has historically put a mystifying veil over the Indigenous' real struggle and resistance to the Spanish domination; the commonly accepted version of a dialogue falsely portrays an idyllic, pacific and permissive people who gently and naively allowed the Spanish domination to take place.

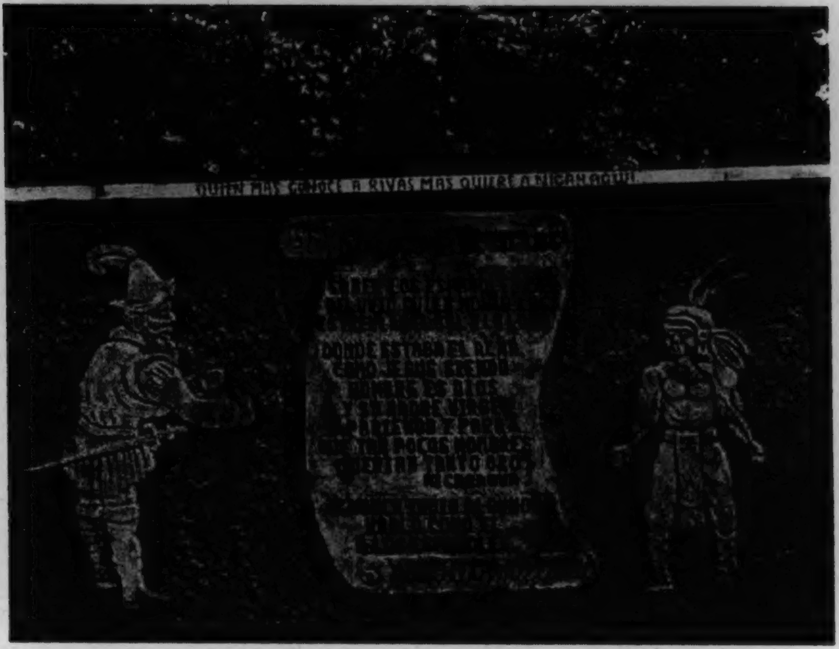

Figure 8.2 Depiction of Caique Nicaragua and Gil Gonzáles' encounter.

Based on the violent character of the conquest, he emphatically asserts that nothing could be further from the truth. The idea of the dialogic encounter falsely promotes "a culture of the colonized", which conveniently legitimizes the social and historical differentiation between the affluent and the dispossessed, benefiting those who inherited the territorial, social, economic and political privileges associated with colonialism (Wheelock 1974). Furthermore, the dialogue has created a myth of "Colonial Peace", and the illusion of a smooth transition. It has created the collective fantasy of the historical conciliation of classes, best expressed in el mestizaje. According to Wheelock (1974:5), the idea of a mestizaje is perhaps by far, the mother myth, which has cemented all the rest of the capillary myths; or at the least, this is how it has been engraved in conservative literature and popular discourse.

> Against the boastful Spanish and against the Indigenous who wanted to go back to prehistory, the definite mestizo conciliation is the synthesis of America. The American mestizaje is much more than the mixing of bloods and races; it is the unification of those incongruities of conditions, of forms… in the historical temple in which our antagonism took place (Picón-Salas 1969 in Wheelock).

Gil Gonzáles Dávila's encounter with the Indigenous people in Nicaragua "was not without its anxious moments" (Walker 2003:10). Although initially submissive, some Indigenous leaders eventually decided to resist the invaders. Among the most legendary leaders of the resistance was Cacique Diriangén. "Several days after an initial meeting with Gonzáles, in which he promised to bring his people to the Spaniard for conversion, Diriangén returned to attack the outsider with several thousand warriors, causing them to retreat overland to the Pacific Ocean" (Walker 2003:10). To make matters worse, before they reached the safety of their Pacific fleet, Gonzáles and his men were also set upon by warriors under the command of cacique Nicaragua (Walker 2003:10), and chased away only temporarily. Eventually, Cacique Nicaragua and his people were subjugated by the Spanish. As stated by Whisnant (1995:15), "few of the rich, varied and vital cultural forms and modes of expression that the Spanish encountered in Nicaragua were destined to survive the conquest, and some were transformed". However, the majority vanished quickly and forever.

The Colonial Period

As the conquest receded into the past, survival of Indigenous culture became a greater issue, since Indigenous people constituted only a decreasing proportion of the increasingly mestizo national population (Whisnant 1995:41). The dramatic decline in the Indigenous population, occurring in the first half of the sixteenth century, resulted in a devastating reduction in the size and number of Indigenous settlements. Some villages were destroyed as a direct result of the conquest, while others suffered depopulation, partly as a consequence of the Indigenous slave trade (Newson 1987), and most significantly due to exposure to diseases brought to the "New World" by the Spaniards. Indigenous people had little natural immunity to even common illnesses such as measles and influenza. Colonization, enslavement and disease went hand in hand as thousands of Indigenous people were killed in battles and thousands were enslaved (Newson 1987) or killed by disease. Friar Bartolome de Las Casas reported that by 1542, 500,000 to 600,000 Indigenous people had been killed in encounters with the Spaniards in Nicaragua (Las Casas 1812:45). Newson (1987:121) argues that this number has been considerably underestimated, given the estimated size of the aboriginal population and the relative ease with which the Spaniards succeeded in pacifying the country.

Although many colonial laws were decreed to protect Indigenous rights, they were largely ineffective because they were almost never enforced. When the domination over Indigenous lands was met with resistance, Spaniards pressed Indigenous people to sell their lands at very low prices or stole them outright. In addition to the plundering of their land, the conquest brought grave consequences to the social, religious, political, economic and demographic spheres of the Indigenous' way of life. The social organization of Indigenous people in the Pacific zone of Nicaragua was modified by a population decline and by the imposition of Spanish institutions and law. The social structures of the Indigenous groups were weakened as caciques, principals and commoners were enslaved and killed and disease eliminated up to 90 percent of the population (Newson 1987:113). With brutal force and supported by religious conviction, the Spanish destroyed or irreversibly altered many of the Indigenous institutions and customs. They took over the palaces of nobles and public buildings for their own administrative purposes. They destroyed Indigenous religious temples and replaced them with Christian churches. The breakdown of the social organization of Indigenous communities and the psychological impact of the conquest resulted in, among other things, a lowering of the birth rate of Indigenous people (Newson 1987:340).

Enslavement (Sherman 1967 in Newson 1987), ill treatment, and overwork had great effects on able-bodied males. Diseases and famines took their heaviest toll on the youngest and oldest members of the population. Chronicler Antonio de Herrera y Tordesillas describes an outbreak of measles in 1531 that killed over six thousand natives in Nicaragua (Quoted in Newson 1987:120):

> At this time, there was such a great epidemic of measles in the Province of Honduras spreading from house to house and village to village, that many people died; and although the disease also affected the Spaniards… none of them died… This same disease of measles and dysentery passed to Nicaragua, where also many Indians [sic] died… and two years ago there was a general epidemic of pains in the side and stomach, which also carried away many Indians [sic] (Herrera in Newson: 120).

In his book on ecological imperialism, Crosby (1986) recognizes that Indigenous people were by no means free of disease before the conquest. Nevertheless, he points out that Indigenous people had never before suffered from measles, cholera, chicken pox, bubonic plague, malaria, yellow fever, scarlet fever, amoebic dysentery, influenza, or smallpox. It was estimated that in Nicaragua the six thousand Indigenous people killed by this outbreak made up one-third of the total population (Newson 1987:120) (see Crosby 1986). Wars, enslavement, cultural destruction, and disease during the colonial period caused a dramatic diminution in the Indigenous population of Nicaragua.

Indigenous Towns in Colonial Rivas

The intensification of agricultural activities, which started during the colonial period and continued throughout the republic, increased the disenfranchisement of Indigenous lands and forced Indigenous people into the colonial economy as wage labourers (Newson 1987:284). In their eagerness to exploit the native source of labour, colonizers transformed a number of Indigenous villages into Spanish towns under the *encomienda* system. An encomienda was a grant of Indigenous people to an individual who, in return for providing Indigenous people "with protection and instruction in the Catholic faith, could levy tribute from them in the form of goods or money, and until 1549, could demand labour services" (Newson 1987:12). Following the establishment of these Spanish towns, Indigenous lands were allocated within the jurisdictions of these towns. The development of the Rivas Valley and the establishment of the Villa de Nicaragua (now Rivas) attracted Indigenous people from other jurisdictions. Most of them were trying to escape tax payments and other exactions imposed by the new Spanish economic order. In 1717 there were 935 Indigenous people in the Rivas Valley and the suburbs of the Villa de Nicaragua, by 1778 their numbers had risen to 2,664 (Newson 1987:284)

During this period, local Nicaraguan authorities exercised control over discreet units of the Indigenous population known as towns, *parcialidades* or lineages (Gould 1990). Exacting records of their whereabouts were carefully kept in administrative archives. The only four parcialidades reported during the colonial Rivas were Tola, Cerros, Popoyuapa, and Poblazón (Rizo Zeledón 1992:39). Out of these four, only three remain today as towns in Rivas, whereas the fourth, Poblazón, seems to have disappeared or changed its name. On the other hand, contemporary Indigenous towns such as Veracruz, Las Salinas, Ostional, and San Jorge were never listed in this colonial index of parcialidades. Some possible explanations include the idea that either these towns were considered non-Indigenous or they did not exist at the time the list was created. It is also possible that some of these Indigenous towns were founded after independence, as it seems to be the case with Veracruz, whose oldest record dates back to 1847. Strategically located between the colonial towns of Tola and Cerros, Veracruz continues to have important economic and kinship ties with these two communities.

In theory, colonial laws allowed Indigenous people to reside "freely" where they so wished. However, drastic and brutal measures were taken to force Indigenous people to return to their villages. In many instances, Indigenous homes were burned and estate owners, who retained Indigenous people in their employment, were severely fined (Newson 1987:184). Fearing death and starvation, many Indigenous people fled into refuge areas where they were able to maintain their autonomy and their own way of life (Chapin 1990:23-27). Undoubtedly, the dispersion of Indigenous people from their communities and the movement of non-Indigenous into the countryside aided in the creation of new settlement patterns. Given this new trend, it is possible that many new towns were founded and many have disappeared. Veracruz seems to be one of these newborn towns in the Rivas region during that period. Furthermore, as pointed out by Borah (1951), Crosby (1986), and Sánchez-Albornoz (1974), in the 1700 there was a general trend in population growth in Latin Americas, due in part to mestizaje, which helped Indigenous populations develop better immunity to European diseases. Later in this chapter, I address in detail the issues surrounding the origin of Veracruz.

The Struggle for Independence

During much of the colonial period, most Indigenous people lived under the control of *encomiendas* and *repartimientos*. In the sixteenth century, labour was organized under the repartimiento. This system required each Indigenous village to make available a quota of its tributary population for approved work for specified periods and wages (Newson 1987:12). Through these systems, the Spaniards were able to control and exploit large Indigenous populations, which eventually sparked uprisings. On December 23, 1811 several thousands of armed Indigenous people from different towns and *parcialidades* in Rivas violently took over the streets of the city. They demanded the installation of a new government and the immediate resignation of Spanish Crown authorities. After successfully assaulting the local military post, the rebels made public other demands. The demands included the reduction of taxes paid by Indigenous people to four *reales* (only two for married men) annually; the elimination of the *encomienda* and the absolute abolition of slavery (Ayón 1956:409). In order to secure their victory, the insurgents asked the Granada *Junta* to supply them with ammunitions, cannons, and other weapons. Between December of 1811 and April of 1812, a successful insurrection in Granada was able to depose the colonial bureaucracy and install a governing *Junta* composed of local people. In addition to sending military equipment to the Rivas rebels, the Granada Junta also provided them with a great number of heavily armed men. The Rivas Indigenous uprising completed a chain of rebellious actions, which lead to the revolutionary wars of independence (Zelaya Goodman in Wheelock 1974:79). In 1812 loyalist General Bustamante sent the Cartago battalion to suppress the Rivas uprising. On April 21 of 1812, the governing Granada Junta and the loyalist signed a peace accord; however, General Bustamante, Bishop García Jeréz and other loyalists did not honour the peace agreement. In fact, they ordered death by firing squad for 17 leaders of the uprising, life imprisonment for 9 of them, while another 133 men were sentenced to other forms of punishment. Many of the dead and punished were Indigenous people (Zelaya Goodman in Wheelock 1974:84).

Despite sporadic defeats where the insurgents were literally drowned in their own blood, the struggle for independence continued (Wheelock 1974). Moved by dreams of freedom, social equality, and the promise of land for every one, thousands of Indigenous people fought and died, along with mestizos, *criollos*[12] and blacks, during the many wars for Nicaraguan independence. The independence of Central America, and consequently of Nicaragua, from Spanish domination was finally declared in Guatemala on September 17, 1821. In October of the same year, the Village of Nicaragua [Rivas] formally signed its independence (Valdés Oliva 1956:197-198). In the years following independence, Central America was involved in a series of wars between Loyalists and Republicans, Conservative and Liberals (for a discussion on the subject see Gould 1990). Many of the independent government policies directly affected the livelihood and culture of the Indigenous people, contributing to their tragic demise. In the following excerpt, Alfredo López, a prominent culturally conservative leader from Veracruz, depicts what independence has meant for the Indigenous people in Nicaragua:

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[12] An *ecomienda* was a grant of indigenous people to an individual, who in return for proving them with protection and instruction in Roman Catholic faith could levy tribute and labour services from them.

> *As far as we are concerned, the transition from colonial ruling to an independent Nicaragua did not change much of the original [material and social] conditions of our people. During the colonial period, our people fought against the Spanish aristocracy and Christian domination, then when the country gained its independence, our people fought against criollo's domination. In a way, things changed, but only to remain the same for us* (ccl. Alfredo López).

The arrival of the Spanish conquistadors in Nicaragua in the sixteenth century, irreversibly transformed the culture and the destiny of its Indigenous people. Those who survived the immediate impact of conquest wars, disease and cultural destruction, had to face a painfully slower and more encompassing system of cultural change. Perhaps

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[12] As opposed to Peninsular Spaniards, criollos was the term given the Spanish people born in the Americas.

among the most significant and enduring changes were brought by the system of encomiendas, which reinforced and extended the effects of earlier years of the conquest In particular, this system transformed Indigenous communities and their economies by changing the cultural features that sustained them, i.e., diets, agricultural systems, land tenure, family structures, social organization and religion (Whisnant 1995:24). The struggles to survive as distinct ethnies became more difficult for Nicaraguan Indigenous people as they were systematically forced to give up many their vital institutions, and particularly their Indigenous languages.

The struggles for independence gave Indigenous people in Nicaragua new hopes for achieving their political goal, choices, and autonomy over their lands and of what was left of their cultural institutions. However, as I discuss it in the following section, none of these expectations took place. The bright and promising social, political and economic changes that followed the colonial period only benefited the new ruling class of Nicaragua, of which Indigenous people were excluded.

The Republic

> *The transition from colonial ruling to an independent Nicaragua did not change much of the original [material and social] conditions of our people. During the colonial period, our people fought against the Spanish aristocracy and Christian domination then they fought against criollo's domination* (ccl. Alfredo López).

The Republic of Nicaragua was declared in Rivas in October 1821. Despite the cooperation between criollos, mestizos, blacks and Indigenous peoples during the battles for independence, the republic was established through the differential expropriation of Indigenous land and exploitation of Indigenous people. Privatization of land through the legislative decrees of March 5, 1830, and April 21, 1836 (Rizo Zeledón 1992:88) meant that the Indigenous population became even more marginalized. Thus, although the struggle to survive as an Indigenous people did not change, with the establishment of the republic, the conditions of these struggles did. During the colonial period, Indigenous people fought from the position of a colonized ethnic. With the creation of an independent republic, Indigenous people began to fight from the position of an Indigenous ethnic and an unprivileged class.

With the emergence of the republic, new wars took place as expressions of class contradictions between competing groups increasingly developed and spread throughout the Central American region. Inevitably, independence unveiled many of the economic and social realities on which Nicaragua was built. Former independence allies were now class enemies. Nicaraguan oligarchs inherited not only the power and control over the land, but also the prejudice against Indigenous people, who they exploited as labourers in their haciendas and as soldiers in their class interest wars. The creation of the republic brought structural, political, economic and social change for Nicaragua. Nonetheless, important aspects about the relationship between Indigenous people and whites remained the same. In the context of a new established nationhood, ideas about the social, physical, ethnic, and intellectual superiority of white people quickly resurfaced.

Almost a decade after independence, crown and ecclesiastical properties were proscribed and auctioned to private owners by the legislative decrees of March 5, 1830; and April 21, 1836 (Rizo Zeledón 1992:88). Since Indigenous land was also considered crown property, much of it was also "expropriated", increasing the marginalization of the Indigenous population even more.

Indigenous Pacification and the Birth of Coffee Plantations in Nicaragua

Between 1875 and 1879, President Pedro Joaquín Chamorro promulgated several anti-Indigenous laws, which sought to take control over Indigenous communal lands in favour of non-Indigenous private ownership. These laws were also designed to protect usurpers who needed more land to cultivate coffee, which had been recently introduced to the country (Miranda Casij 1972).

> Measures designed to acculturate and pacify Indigenous people gained new force from the constitution of 1858 and from President Tomás Martínez's drive to stimulate agro-export production- including coffee, the major boom in which was still a few years away. If agro-export production was to increase, Nicaragua's perennial labour shortage had to be remedied by increasing the supply of Indian [sic] labour, and desirable land- much of which remained under Indian [sic] control despite massive expropriations during the colonial era- had to be mad available to coffee growers (Whisnant 1995:59).

In order to attract foreign investments, between 1887 and 1889, President Evaristo Carazo gave free land to prospective coffee lords, mainly to German, British, and U.S. investors. Once the coffee plantations were set up, 80% of the laborers who were to work as coffee pickers, were employed by force (Gould -1990:43). In 1897 Nicolas Delaney, a U.S. citizen who, in 1892, had 23,000 coffee trees admitted that coffee plantations in these regions were dependent on forced labour. In a letter sent to the U.S. government on May 4, 1911, Delaney asked the U.S. government for the re-implementation of forced labour (Gould 1990). Once these laws were implemented, hundreds of workers seeking freedom managed to escape the plantations. One of every three forced labourers became a fugitive being pursued by the police. Many Indigenous people were forced to work in the coffee plantations. Some of them, enraged, decided to protest in courts, while others took up arms in rebellion (Gould 1990:43).

Afraid of the increasing belligerence of the Indigenous, Nicaraguan Liberals and Conservatives alike promoted a discourse, which overtly portrayed Indigenous people as "savages". They "thought they heard the roar of barbarism from their country-side before the gates of their cities [and therefore] assumed the duty to introduce civilization to their compatriots" (Burns in Whisnant 1995:58). Burns (in Whisnant 1995:58) suggests that the elites' reformist cultural paradigm made special targets of Indigenous people who were conceived as "barbarous". Largely, the elites chose to ignore the Indigenous people's own cultural preferences for egalitarianism, communally owned land, governance systems like the Monéxico, and Indigenous language and cosmology. The elites interpreted Indigenous peoples' resistance to economic exploitation as "laziness"' issuing from a lack of "respect" for the wealth that characterizes civilization. This disregard for Indigenous cultural preferences was not a new attitude. Spanish chroniclers during the first year of the colonial period had already dismissed Indigenous people as lazy. Juan López de Velasco described the Indigenous people of Nicaragua in the following manner: "The Indians from these lands are loyal and respectful of the laws, but they are very poor because they are lazy and live in indolence" (López de Velasco 1975:190). Many of these stereotypes still haunt Indigenous people in Nicaragua today. Ironically, despite stereotypes used to degrade the image and the moral value of the Indigenous people, Indigenous people made important and strategic contributions to struggle for national independence. However, none of these contributions seems to have been more significant and futile than the one suggested by a leader from Veracruz:

> *Our major contributions to the struggle for independence in Nicaragua were our dead. Many of our people died during the independence struggle, but at the end, we did not get much of the freedom and progress it was supposed to bring us. With the creation of the republic of Nicaragua, nothing really changed. Our people continued to be politically and economically utilized and exploited by the new bosses. Under new political conditions, the new bosses instituted a renewed system of discrimination against Indigenous peoples* (ccl. Pedro Gonzáles).

As pointed out by Walker (1981:10), the early years of the colonial period had a profound and lasting impact on the nature of Nicaraguan society, culture and politics. Perhaps the most important and tragic result of the conquest and its subsequent developments was demographic, i.e., the near total destruction of its large Indigenous population. For Indigenous people, the end of the colonial rule in Central America meant the removal of an external ruling force only to be replaced by a homegrown one. As a result, Veracruceños as well as Nicaragua's Indigenous people in general continued to be economically exploited, socially marginalized and the subject of cultural extermination.

Veracruceños Purchased Their Land

In 1847, twenty-six years after Nicaragua achieved independence from Spain, the land that Veracruceños had traditionally occupied was confiscated using the legislative decrees of March 5 and April 22, 1830, which stipulated that crown and ecclesiastic properties had to be proscribed and auctioned to private owners. According to Veracruceños' oral tradition, under the protection of these decrees, José Ruíz, who was also a public notary, fraudulently claimed ownership of the land occupied by Veracruceños. During this period, José Ruíz was given legal title to and absolute control of the Veracruceño territory by the then government sub-commissioner for the department of Rivas, don J. Martiniano. Left landless, Veracruceños were forced to purchase from José Ruíz, the land that was once their own.

During an interview, Arturón Morales (a senior monéxico member from Veracruz and culturally conservative leader) orally reconstructed part of the events that took place in relation to the purchasing of their land. This is how most people in the community remember these events:

> *In order to gain control of the newly usurped lands, the presumed new owner, who was no more than an ill-mannered usurper, tried to evict us. However, our people were already so accustomed to fighting for their rights that they immediately organized a massive protest. They emphatically claimed their historical and natural right to the territory. Ruíz realized that getting rid of our people wasn't going to be an easy task. That is why he felt he had no other choice but to work a deal with our people. The same year, a historical agreement to formally purchase the land was drafted. Community*

leaders Pedro Mata, Pedro Ponce and Atanacio Pérez signed it on behalf of the people of Veracruz and Ruíz on his and his siblings' behalf. The purpose of the contract was to eventually obtain legal ownership of the land by ironically buying it from the person that had taken it away from us in the first place. Our leaders decided that, in order to make sure every member of the community could claim legal and moral rights over the land, they all should contribute with their labour to gather the money. It was in this manner that men and women, including youth, children, and the elderly, donated many hours of their labour to purchase the land. Most males worked in agricultural fields and in indigo processing plants at hacienda El Camarón [The Shrimp], *while the majority of females laboured in the hacienda's kitchens and other domestic jobs. A few more went to the pacific coast to gather snails used as natural colors for fabric. Many stories are still told about how the whole community got involved in collecting the money to purchase the land. The payments were arranged as 20 pesos duros or fuertes in the summer and 20 in the winter, making a total 40 annually* (ccl. Arturón Morales).

Pesos *duros* or *fuertes* (hard or strong pesos, both terms were used interchangeably) was the Spanish currency. Similar to the colonial shilling, they were intended to serve as universal money, as opposed to local currency, which was considered pesos *sencillos* or simple (see Sumner 2002).

Due to the 1845-1851 wars between Federalist and Conservative aristocracy in Nicaragua, all the works and dealings to purchase the lands were suspended for approximately ten years. It was finally in 1860, when the people of Veracruz made their last payments to purchase the land. In total they paid the equivalent of 400.00 pesos sencillos (320.00 pesos fuertes). The lands were finally, formally acquired thirteen years after the original contract was signed. On the July 3, 1860 José Ruiz, representing himself, and Pedro Mata, Pedro Ponce, and Atanacio Pérez, representing the community, signed the documents that entitled Veracruceños as the rightful owners of their territory. A public notary named Teodoro Granados did all the legal paper work in the city of Rivas. On August 9, 1888 Pedro Mata, Pedro Ponce, and Atanacio Pérez finally registered the community's property in el Libro de Registro de la Propiedad of the Department of Rivas, or the Department of Land Registry in Rivas.

On July 27, 1929, forty years after it was first registered, Salomon Moraga, who at the time was the community's president, requested the transference of the title from the archaic registry to a newly instituted one. Juan F. Guerra, a public notary from Rivas registered the property two days later. This land title is important for Veracruceños because not only it warrants them as the rightful owners of the territory, but also because it legally demonstrates that they constitute an Indigenous community. The document literally states that the people of Veracruz del Zapotal are an Indigenous people under the Nicaraguan law. The oldest written record of the presence of Veracruceños as Indigenous people in the region comes from their land title. Although new copies have been legally made, the community still zealously keeps the original and antique title as one of their most precious and historical documents.

Originally, the territory of Veracruz measured 8,580,746 square meters. Several signposts were placed to accurately demarcate the territory. For our people those signposts had a lot of symbolic value. In fact, some of them have become very important *icons of the Indigeneity and territoriality for us. Without a doubt the most memorable relic, even today, is la Piedra Labrada (the carved stone). It is a fancy carved stone brought from Granada as an emblem of the first signpost for the newly acquired territory. It is still in its original place where it was installed almost one hundred and fifty years ago, right at onset of the Camarón River. Two other signposts were placed heading south of the Piedra Labrada and over the mountains, passing Rio Grande, whose previous name was El Tempisque River, ending in Los Horcones, near the mouth of Guchipilín River* (ccl. Alfredo López.).

When people tell me that I am not an Indigenous person because I don't speak an Indigenous language, I tell them that I don't have to prove my Indigeneity by speaking an Indigenous language. I am an Indigenous person because I was born Indigenous, and if they don't believe me I tell them that we have a document to prove it. Our land title clearly says we are an Indigenous community. Hence, we're Indigenous people (ccl. Arturón Morales.).

Pragmatically, collective land ownership has always been a source of group subsistence and territorial unity for Veracruceños. Symbolically, it represents one of the most important objective markers of their Indigenous identity. *La Piedra labrada,* which was brought from Granada to Veracruz in the late nineteen century as an emblem to demarcate the Indigenous territory, is now an objective and historic marker of the community's identity.

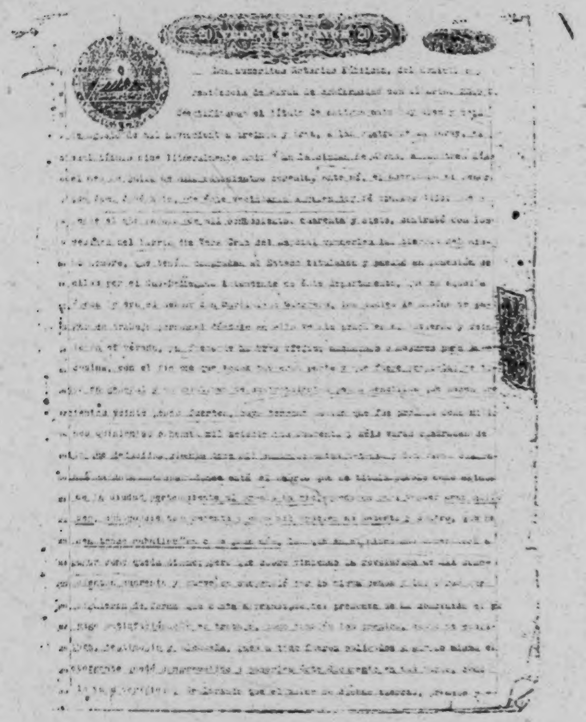

Figure 9.2 Copy of the Veracruz land title.

The stories of "the purchasing of the land" and of "the journey to Granada to bring La Piedra Labrada to the community" are often told to children by the elders with such reverence that the stories have somewhat acquired the status of local "origin myths". As origin myths, these historical events neatly integrate community social experiences with a wider set of assumptions about group history and identity. At the same time, the stories are also reified in their own objective reality. Both the land and the symbolic markers demarcating the Indigenous territory are tangible and contemporary signifier of identity.

Figure 10.2 Partial view of La Piedra Labrada

About Their Name: Veracruceños

The people of Veracruz are known as Veracruceños, from the name "Veracruz" with the suffix "eños", one of several suffixes commonly added in Spanish to the names of places. It denotes that the people are from the place whose name the suffix modifies. Hence, in Spanish, we have Salvadoreños, meaning people from El Salvador, or Hondureños, people from Honduras[13].

As pointed out by Salvadorian historian Escalante (in De Burgos 1999:98), when the Spanish began the process of evangelization of the Indigenous people in the Americas, with stubborn religious advocacy the Spanish imposed Christian names on the

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[13] Other suffixes include *ano* and, *ense* as in Peruano (Peruvian) and Nicaragüense or Canadiense (Canadian).

Indigenous places they encountered. Sometimes, however, due to Indigenous resistance to these impositions, the Spanish cleverly combined Christian and vernacular names. This practice explains how places such as "El Zapotal", became "Veracruz del Zapotal". Through religious advocacy, "La Vera Cruz", which stands for the "the True Cross" in the Catholic tradition, was given as a new name to the hamlet of El Zapotal, now the Indigenous town of Veracruz del Zapotal. Although Christian *advocacy* through the christening of places of what is now referred to as "the Americas", started during colonization, it is still widely practiced by Catholics in Latin America (De Burgos 1999). "El Zapotal", is the hispanization of the Nahua noun for "a place planted with plenty of zapote tress". The word zapote refers to both the tree and its sweet and fleshy fruit (*Phytolacca dioica*). All of this reflects the toponymical nature of the original name, a clear trait of their Nahua heritage (see Dávila Bolaños 1967).

The Possible Origins of the Village of Veracruz

For many years, the Indigenous people of Veracruz were relatively unknown to the majority of Rivans, not to mention the rest of Nicaragua. Up until the first decades of the twentieth century, the community was so enclosed that it was virtually a completely endogamous society (Rizo Zeledón 1992:85). It was what Wolf (1955) would describe as a "closed corporate peasant community", with not only a marked tendency to exclude the outsiders as persons, but also to limit the flow of goods and ideas into the community. This period of significant cultural and social isolation from the larger Nicaraguan society left traceable social marks on its population. Presently, only a small cluster of last names predominate in the community. Consanguinity and affinity of some type relates eighty percent of the population. The similarities found between contemporary Veracruceños and the ancient Nicarao (the Nahua speaking people occupying the Isthmus of Rivas at the time of the conquest) concerning their diet, social organization, and remnants of the Nahua language are abundant. Before Veracruceños were forced to adopt Spanish as their new language, they spoke Nahua. Unfortunately, the last of the Nahua speakers in Veracruz died in the mid-1930s.

Although, there seems to be enough evidence to indicate that Veracruceños are in fact linked to their Nicarao ancestry as they claim to be, Rizo Zeledón (1992) as one of the few scholars who has written briefly about the people of Veracruz, questions their Nicarao lineage. Apart from land title dating from 1860, which literally stipulates that they are an Indigenous group, Rizo Zeledón argues that there is little evidence of their historical presence in their territory. Furthermore, he claims that because Veracruz was never listed as a *parcialidad* or as an Indigenous town in the Regal Village of Rivas during the colonial period, it is very unlikely that the people of Veracruceños are native to this region. He suggests that "if this is the case, Veracruceños are clearly not descendents of the Nicarao people" (Rizo Zeledón 1992: 85). This speculation rings hollow since there is other evidence to consider. For instance, Gonzales Dávila (1883) and Cereceda (1883) reported six large settlements in the Isthmus of Rivas at the time of colonial contact. Most were Nicarao people living only one and a half to two leagues (8.5-11 kilometers) away from each other (Healy 1980:338 in Fowler 1989:133). That is precisely the distance between Veracruz and San Jorge, the site where Gil Gonzales

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3 The chronicle Antonio de Cibdad Real refers to the province of Nicaragua as San Jorge. This seems to be the oldest reference there is about the City of San Jorge as a Spanish town (Cibdad Real 1975:146).

Dávila met Cacique Nicaragua. Not having been listed on Rivas' colonial records can only demonstrate three possibilities: 1) Due to a small number of people, the village was not formally recognized by the colonial authorities as a *parcialidad*; 2) the village did not exist at its present site; or 3) the village of Veracruz as the territorial space, not the community of people, did not exist at all. I prefer the last proposition since it is clear that Veracruz was not a well-established Indigenous town during the early years of the conquest.

Chronicler Juan de Velasco provided a detailed list of all the Indigenous tributary towns and nowhere in it does Veracruz or El Zapotal appear (1975:183-186). It seems more plausible that Veracruz was founded by end of the colonial period or at the beginning of the republic. It is not difficult to infer, judging by local, contemporary migratory patterns, how this community came to be through the convergence of several Indigenous families into the region, who were attracted or perhaps forced, by "one of the biggest indigo industry in the Nicaraguan pacific", La Hacienda *El Camarón* (Romero 1992). It is possible that several Nahua families originally came from Cerros and Tola and founded Veracruz. They are still neighboring towns, and Veracruceños continue to have important kin and commercial links with these two communities. Furthermore, no archeological research has ever been carried out in Veracruz *per se*; therefore, one cannot speak of an absolute lack of evidence. Informally, however, Nahua ceramic artifacts have been recently found in Veracruz. Some of the findings are currently being exhibited at the Rivas Museum of History and Anthropology (Valdez[14] 2002, personal communication).

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[14] Dr. Ramón Valdez is a lawyer, local historian and founder of the Rivas Museum of Anthropology.

Although discussing the origins of the village of Veracruz is beyond the scope of this study, I consider it important since some of my arguments help to refute claims of invalidation made by Rizo Zeledón (1992) of the historical origins and identity of Veracruceños. Rizo Zeledón seems to be interested in external and empirical sources to validate their identity. I am much more interest in understanding the Veracruceños' subjective aspects of ethnic and identity formation. Veracruceños' historical memory of their Indigenous ancestry is seen as going back to the arrival of the Nahua people to Central America from Mexico. However, their historical memory about the village of Veracruz goes as back as far as the eighteen hundreds when a group of Indigenous leaders purchased their land. Before that, they speak about themselves as Nahua people inhabiting the whole Isthmus of Rivas. The fact that the village could have been founded in the eighteen hundreds does not take away the Indigenous ancestry of its founders. Furthermore, Veracruceños are not claiming a Veracruceño identity. That only denotes where they are from, not who they *are* as an ethnie. They are claiming an Indigenous, Nahua identity. Therefore, it is irrelevant whether the settlement named Veracruz existed in its current place during the colonial period or not. Finally, since there is abundant evidence of Nicarao occupying the Isthmus of Rivas, any contemporary group claiming Nahua ancestry in this region is likely to be a descendent of Nicarao people.

The Legalization of the Community

Between 1914 and 1919, the Liberal government in Nicaragua implemented a series of decrees known as Las Leyes de Comunidades Indígenas (Laws of Indigenous Communities). According to these laws, all municipalities in Nicaragua were obliged to recognize and respect Indigenous communities within their territorial jurisdiction, only if these Indigenous communities were legally recognized by the state. Seeking protection under these new laws, Veracruceños decided to legally register their community. To some degree, this would bring them government support and recognition. Through a presidential decree on June 4, 1915, the community of Veracruz was officially recognized as a legitimate, (ostensibly) autonomous, and legally constituted Indigenous community.

This "legalization" took place during time of the liberal administration of Carlos José Solórzano. He reformed the 1906 and 1908 Indigenous laws decreed by Zelaya's government, which had left many Indigenous communities close to legal extinction. In 1910, the Liberal Party president Zelaya had "abolished the 'Indians' of Nicaragua. He imposed Spanish as the official language and accepted as 'Occidental', all who dressed in European fashion. "Many Indigenous people [in Nicaragua] abandoned their dress and customs in order to participate in the economic life of the country" (Hoyt 1997:85). During the Zelaya years, many Indigenous communities in Rivas underwent difficult times and unstable social situations. In the midst of all this, some communities regrettably became legally and *de facto* extinct. The Indigenous community of San Jorge is an example of the vanishing of an Indigenous society (Romero 1992).

In 1914, one year before the community obtained its legal status, Veracruceños found themselves, once again, in the middle of a dispute over their territory with a local landlord. As usual, the community organized itself to fight for its land under the leadership of Isabel López and Alberto Moraga. Veracruceños were victorious and were able to keep their land. Veracruceños state that these events forced them to become more politically active and ethnically assertive. It also points to the interconnection of political, social and legal processes and institutions in constituting "identity" as a tangible entity.

The History of la Directiva

For Veracruceños, acquiring government recognition was a "trade off". In exchange for legal recognition, the community was forced to artificially create a board of directors. Veracruceños realized that *la Directiva*, as they call this board, was created with the goal of running the community's affairs as a business and not as a society of thinking, meaning, and feeling individuals. The government specifically demanded that all forms of community government had to be abolished, and replaced with new, modern forms of political administration. For Veracruceños this meant having to replace natural leaders for a board of directors appointed by the Nicaraguan government. A president, vice president, secretary, treasurer, an attorney, and several members at large constituted the new governing body. Absolute decision-making power was legally given to the the president by government designed community statutes. Many leaders criticized this move and saw it as a threat to community organization and local political administration:

> *Not every Indigenous community in the department of Rivas and in Nicaragua is legally recognized by the state. Out the five known Indigenous communities in Rivas, Ostional, Nancimí, Las Salinas and San Jorge, Veracruz is the only community that has legal status. Being legally recognized means having* (personería juridical*) attorneyship* [or legal status]. *Having an attorneyship has its advantages. For example, it exonerates us from having to pay some taxes. We can be heard directly by government officials*

without the Rivas mayor as an intermediary. We don't have to bother anymore having to go to see the mayor of Rivas when we need to speak to the national government. The president of la Directiva, as the legal representative of the community, has power similar to that of a mayor. Unlike our traditional authority, the president of the Directiva represents formal authority from the legal point of view. He has the right to be heard by government officials in relation to any matter. Attorneyship also gives us the right to be taken into consideration for any development plan the government might have in mind and could affect us. We have revenue rights to the territory. We collect local taxes and control all the natural resources in or territory. Even to cut a tree people need a written permit from the community's president (ccl. Alex Morales, youth leader).

Veracruceños claim that prior to the imposition of la Directiva, local authority and decision-making power rested on the capability of the Monéxico. For Veracruceños, however, the unfair requirement of having to set up a board did not change the political composition of the distribution of decision-making power; it only modified the dynamics of the exercise of that power. In the eyes of the government, the president became a politically important legal, public figure. Real power, however, continued to be equally distributed among members of the Monéxico.

La Directiva was imposed to guarantee that a small and selected group of people could be in control of the community and in that manner the government could take away our lands legally, without much protest from the community. It is easier to buy a president than it is to buy a whole council. Before the imposition of la directiva the whole *community assembly made all the decisions. Things continue the same, because, fortunately, la directiva didn't work according to the government's initial plans … community control of local affairs continues to be the competence of the Monéxico alone* (ccl. Alfredo López.).

The first Directiva was appointed the same year and members were elected through a popular vote. Even though the Monéxico was a secret activity for the first two decades, every member of la Directiva automatically became a member of it. In theory, only people who were considered "government-friendly" were elected into la Directiva. In reality, however, only the locally recognized natural leaders were ever appointed. Natural leadership continued to be essential for holding office. For Veracruceños, a natural leader is a male or female individual, who is capable of influencing the community by teaching with examples without having any formal authority.

The imposition of the Directiva on our social organization was a political move to try to control us better. Obviously, the government thought that it was going to be easier to persuade a president than a whole council of presidents, the Monéxico. But somehow it backfired for the government because with time we learned how to use that power to our own advantage. On the surface, the structure of La Directiva is exactly what the government told our people to do, but inside we know how to do things our way (ccl. Pedro Gonzáles).

Although originally the Nicaraguan government imposed la Directiva in 1915, this foreign form of political organization eventually became an autochthonal practice in Veracruz. Indigenous significance was given to an imposed foreign practice, which was soon incorporated into the local structures of meaning. Far from weakening their structure of traditional political organization, it paradoxically strengthened them by alerting the people of the Nicaraguan government's intentions to abolish their Indigenous forms of political administration. Nowadays, for Veracruceños la Directiva is as Indigenous an institution as it is the monéxico or their land tenure system.

The Somoza Era

Nicaragua's forty-two-and-a-half-year subjugation to the Somoza dictatorship was unique in duration and in its dynastic character (Walker 2003:25). For Veracruceños, as it is for other Indigenous people in Nicaragua, the Somoza era represents an important landmark in the history of their struggle to persist as Indigenous peoples. The creation of the *Instituto Indigenista Nacional* (National Indigenist Institute) in 1941 and the implementation of policies to "civilize" Indigenous people and assimilate them into Nicaraguan national mestizo culture, are some of the contradictions that characterized the relationship between the Somoza and Indigenous people. During the Somoza era, a publicly benevolent discourse about Indigenous people and culture was made popular in Nicaragua. Many people from Veracruz still remember this period with nostalgia while others bitterly try to forget what they call "the reign of terror" associated with the Somoza.

The founder of the Somoza dynasty, Anastasio Somoza García, began ruling in 1937 and ended in 1956, when a poet named Rigoberto López Pérez killed him. His oldest son, Luis Somoza Debayle, succeeded him and stayed in power from 1957 to 1967. After Luis' death, his younger brother Anastasio Somoza Debayle took power from 1967 to 1979, until his deposition, marking end of the dictatorship. The Somoza consistently made alliances with the economic elite with whom they associated, while they rhetorically pleased the working class and Indigenous groups (Hernandez 1969). Aware of the political values of venerating *campesino* (rural people) and Indigenous culture, the Somoza were interested in adulating those portions of the population that were, or who could pass for Indigenous people. Undoubtedly, a "romanticized characterization of Indigenous culture proved more deployable to the elites, than were the disagreeable realities of working-class, campesino and Indigenous life" (Whisnant 1995:17). Masked by a false veneration of Indigenous values, Somoza García came across as a redeemer of the working class and Indigenous people. In fact, even today some Indigenous people in Veracruz remember, with certain nostalgia, the benevolent character of General Somoza García toward their Indigenous cause. Others comment with contempt the repressive history of the Somoza regime. The following quotes illustrate these points.

> *Somoza was good to us. He was tough, but his Guardsmen always watched over us to protect us. Somoza understood us as Indigenous people and supported our culture. "You are good Indians" he would tell us. My grandma really liked him because he was good to us. He spoke nicely about Indigenous people. He used to say that he liked our*

> *culture and traditions. He wanted to help us prosper, but some people here did not like to prosper. He wanted to make life better for us, but we had to support him and show that support in public. Our leaders had to agree with his plans and political ideas. That's all he wanted as a way of showing gratitude* (Mateo M.)

> *The Somoza government was a two-face regime; it would give us meager food with one hand and ill-treated us with the other. It was a repressive and bloody dictatorship. Members of the Somoza National Guard would rape our women and there was no place to go to demand justice. If you would oppose their ideas, you were labeled a rebel and killed as an example for others to see. The only "good Indians", as he called us, were those would do as they say* (ccl. Pedro Gonzáles).

Somoza's appreciation of Indigenous culture was never genuine. As many Nicaraguans remember it, he was much more interested in power, sports, horses, expensive automobiles, Hollywood movies, love affairs with women, *bacanales* (partying) and drinking than he was with any Indigenous concerns. The Somoza dynasty implemented policies consistent with their interests, marked by an ambiguous relationship with Indigenous people and culture (Delgado 2002, personal communication[15]).

The longstanding opposition to the Somoza regime quickly spread to all economic classes and ethnies after the devastating earthquake of 1972 and the shamelessly corrupted manner in which international aid was administered (see Lake 1989 for thorough discussion of the falling of Somoza). The two major political groups to counter the regime were the FSLN (Frente Sandinista de Liberacíon Nacional, also known as the Sandinistas) and the UDEL (Unión Democrática Liberal, Democratic Liberal Union), led by Pedro Joaquín Chamorro who was a publisher of La Prensa, a newspaper critical of the Somoza dictatorship. On January 10, 1978, Pedro Joaquin Chamorro was gunned down in Managua. His murder provoked violent demonstrations and demands for Somoza's resignation, instigating a civil war in Nicaragua and marking the beginning of the end of the authoritarian Somoza family regime (Walker 2003:34).

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[15] Dr. Manuel Delgado is rector of the Universidad Hispanoamericana in Rivas.

Nowadays, Veracruceños assert that on the one hand, the Somoza era helped to bring national and international attention to Indigenous people and culture, promoting in this way their ethnic identity. On the other hand, however, some Veracruceños realize how the Somoza consciously used Indigenous people and culture to create a false image of a benevolent regime in order to hide the repressive character of the dictatorship.

> *Here in Veracruz, our people suffered the consequences of the military repression, and economic violence imposed by the Somoza regime. However, if you talk to some of the older people in the village, you will find that some of them will tell you that Somoza was a good man, too. But that is because he actually fooled some of us into believing in his promises and because the paid attention to us* (ccl. Alfredo López.).

For some Veracruceños the Somoza were, in fact, good people, but only with the "good Indians", and 'good Indians' were submissive, apolitical, socially obedient, traditional, and supportive of their regime. As many Veracruceños recall today, the Somoza made promises to improve the social and material conditions of Indigenous people, but never delivered those promises. Paradoxically, the Somoza wanted to help Indigenous people by trying to persuade them to abandon their way of life, which the Somoza saw as stagnant, uncivilized and primitive.

> The divided agenda of veneration and manipulation was evident in Nicaragua's Instituto Indigenista Nacional, founded in December 1941 for the ostensibly purpose of studying "the Indigenous problem in Nicaragua... toward the end improving the conditions of life for Nicaraguan Indians" [sic]. Voicing alarm that "groups of purely Indigenous people" (grupos de Indígenas puros) were disappearing, that the few remaining ones of the most part had lost their primitive language and their customs, and were adapting themselves more and more to "western civilization" the institute called its members to the "high social labour" of the "culturation of our Indigenous masses" (la culturación de nuestras masas Indígenas) (Nicaragua *Indígena in Whisnant* 1995:118).

The creation of government institutions to address the "Indian problem" during the Somoza' era seem to have been geared toward assimilating Indigenous people into the national mestizo life. For Veracruceños this represented another episode in the longstanding struggle to assert ethnic identity in the face of governmental threat to their culture and Indigenous identity. As put by Amselle (1999 quoted in Niezen 2003:6), "cultural identities are stimulated by their denial".

El Período Sandinista (The Sandinistas Period)

After eighteen months of intense conflict and guerrilla insurgency across the country, on July 19, 1979, the FSLN victoriously entered Managua and accepted the surrender of Somoza's National Guard (Walker 1981:40) and stayed in power for ten years. Within a month of President Reagan's inauguration in January of 1981, former members of Somoza's National Guards were training in Florida to fight against the

Sandinistas (Hoyt 1997:50). These counterrevolutionaries came to be known as the *contras*. Between trying to build a new nation and fighting against the contras, the FSLN implemented an agrarian reform among other radical policies. Since the reform was not to handle communally owned lands, Indigenous communal lands were to be formally demarcated as Indigenous territory, in order to exempt them from the agrarian amendment. Once Indigenous lands had been properly demarcated, adjacent lands were confiscated and used as state farms and cooperatives. It was because of this government initiative that some of the lands Veracruceños had lost in the 1960s were returned to them. In the 1960s, Juan Salinas, an individual with no relation to the community and under the protection of the Somoza dictatorship, fraudulently claimed ownership of over one-sixth of the Veracruz territory. During the Sandinista agrarian reform, the land was confiscated and allocated to a cooperative comprised of people from Veracruz.

> *At one point, after the triumph of the revolution, some Sandinista leaders didn't want to acknowledge our Indigenous autonomy. Some of them even tried to create parallel committees in the community at the comarca level in order to replace our traditional social and political structures and transform us into Nicaraguan peasants. That was our particular experience. However, in San Lucas things were very much different. In San Lucas, the Sandinistas helped Indigenous people organize themselves, as Indigenous people, into agricultural cooperatives, which benefited many Indigenous people by giving them land* (cc. Nicolas Cajina).

At the beginning of the revolution, the majority of Veracruceños identified themselves with the Sandinistas. Many joined in the revolutionary struggle as part of the militia. Indigenous people, as a whole, represented an important political sector of Nicaraguan society. However, as Montenegro (in Hoyt 1997:84) has pointed out, in many respects the Sandinista vision of a participatory democracy was not as inclusive as it should have been, particularly in adequately incorporating Indigenous ethnies into the national project. For example, Indigenous ideas concerning the relationship between humans and nature were largely ignored. The culturally insensitive application of western philosophy on Indigenous culture did not contribute to an effective incorporation of the Indigenous people into the revolution. In this regard, Montenegro makes an important observation suggesting that the leftwing in Nicaragua did not incorporate anthropological concepts (rather than political concepts) into their revolutionary project. This was the case, according to Montenegro, because the left was married entirely to the strict classical scheme of "bourgeoisie vs. proletariat" without analyzing the cultural differences and "civilizing" conflicts were taking place.

> [T]he contradiction city/countryside or city-dweller/peasant has a variation here. The Indigenous is permanently in revolt, in rejection of white, western modernity and progress. Within each peasant in Nicaragua exists the Indian [sic] culturally speaking. What has happened here is not a mixing of the races but a clash of two civilizations, the Occidental and the Indigenous, in which one imposed itself on the other but was never able to completely conquer it (Montenegro in Hoyt 1997:84).

National Nicaraguan culture has created the myth of a mestizo Nicaraguan society that denies the existence of the numerous Indigenous societies in the country. Membreño (1992) argues this myth is an ideology constructed on racial criteria and conceptions that do not reflect the fact that some Indigenous people, indeed, resisted the conquest and the subsequent colonization, Zelaya's liberalism, mercantilist and capitalist relations, and the Sandinistas' tendencies to assimilate them. He also suggests that among the many cultural particularities of Indigenous people in Nicaragua, they do not accept as local authority anyone who is not part of their society. The Sandinista, he argues, failed to understand this principle. Furthermore, during the Sandinista years, many leaders were not totally convinced that Indigenous communities from the Central and Pacific regions of Nicaragua were "authentic" Indigenous societies (Membreño 1992:2). Veracruceños recalled many anecdotes of how some Sandinista leaders truly believed that the peasant communities, who called themselves "Indigenous people", did so as opportunistic individuals. These communities were regarded as groups that were maliciously trying to take some prerogatives away from the state, the Party and the Sandinista mass movement. According to Membreño, save the Miskitos, Sumus or Ramas, for the Sandinistas, these self-proclaimed Indigenous people did not have the physical and social characteristics found in "authentic" Indigenous societies. These characteristics included "racial" phenotypes (skin colour, etc.,) distinct from whites and mestizos, a language other than Spanish, a wild or semi-wild habitat where they could forage or hunt and gather, and technology such as bows and arrows (Membreño 1992:2). Since ethnies from these Central and Pacific regions in Nicaragua did not have the stereotypical characteristics found in other Indigenous societies, it was understandable that many Sandinista leaders would not regard those groups as authentic Indigenous people. Rather, they were simply seen as "mestizos" trying to pass for Indigenous people. Consequently, according to Membreño (1992:2), there was no acceptable reason as to why the Sandinista State should design special socio-political and cultural policies to give different treatment to the Indigenous people than what was given to regular mestizo peasants. At best, the presumed Indigenous character, which Sandinistas would ascribe to people from the Central and the Pacific region, was that of being emblematic of the National folklore, expressed in commercial arts and crafts. Alternatively, Indigenous people were attributed to the politico-ideological myth of the fierce Indigenous insurgent, associated with the Sandinista struggle against Somoza (nicc. Delgado 2002). In February of 1978 in Monimbó, an Indigenous neighborhood in Masaya, a group of poorly armed civilians rose up against the Somoza dictatorship only to be brutally pounded into submission. The fighting continued and eventually, "the inhabitants set up barricades, hoisted banners declaring Monimbó to be a free territory and held the guard back for almost a week with a pathetic assortment of weapons consisting of homemade bombs, 22-caliber rifles, pistols, machetes, axes, rocks, and clubs" (Walker 2003:36). Membreño (1992:2) points out that the curious part was that the stereotype which deny the ethnic character of communities that call themselves Indigenous, could be found "not only among certain Sandinista leaders but also in broad circle of intellectuals (historians, economists, anthropologists and the like)."

However, as the Sandinistas gradually recognized their errors in the application of Marxists precepts on Indigenous people, the inherent problems found in a cultural clash of two civilizations were being slowly solved. Culutal consultant Julio Silva, a medical doctor who worked several years for the Sandinista government stated that searching new modes and strategies to adequately merge a revolutionary program with a traditional Indigenous reality was a priority. Furthermore, according to Silva, rather than trying to absorb Indigenous cultures into mainstream society, as past governments have tried, the Sandinistas made a conscious effort to recuperate Indigenous people's traditions, culture, and even languages. The following is a testimony from this physician who worked at implementing some of these policies in an Indigenous community:

> *For example in the Atlantic coast where I worked as physician for two years during the revolution, the revolutionary government implemented educational programs designed to protect the Indigenous way of life, culture, and language. Texts and other didactic material for the alphabetization program were written in their languages* [Miskito and Sumo] (nicc. Silva 2004).

Similar culturally sensitive policies were implemented in Veracruz and other Indigenous communities form the Central and Pacific regions. However, Indigenous people were always skeptical about the way these policies were implemented. Several confrontations with the Sandinista government took place in Veracruz. The following testimonies are from two Veracruceño leaders who recall that, while good programs were implemented in the community, the Sandinistas attempted to dissolve some of their local Indigenous institutions:

> *They [the Sandinista government] helped us with machinery, seeds, fertilizers, technical advice and support, but they also tried to dismantle the Directiva and impose a more politically militant type of social organization. We did not like the idea. We were used to having a Directiva and did not want to change it. Our then president was in*

hiding for a while for opposing the Sandinista proposal. The community was divided over other issues, because in addition to abolishing the Directiva they also wanted to abolish the land tax we paid to the community every year. Many people in the here wanted to see the land tax abolished and supported the Sandinista initiative. The taxes were suspended for a while. However, through lobbying, at the end, we managed to keep things the way they were (ccl. Pedro Gonzales.)

Although sometimes we felt that in some way they [the Sandinista government] denied our Indigeneity because they treated us like regular Nicaraguan peasants, and disregard some of our special claims, we benefited from the revolution in other ways. We all learned how to read and write and there were always food and healthcare in the community. Everything was cheap...beer, cigarettes, food, seeds, fertilizers, and agricultural machinery. Only those who were lazy did not produce and protested (Arturón Morales).

In 1979, the Sandinistas implemented for the first time in Nicaragua a program, for medical integration. The Sandinistas incorporated midwives and other traditional healers into the national medical system. I feel that the government seriously took into account traditional medical people by giving us technical assistance and general support. That's good, but it is all gone (cc. Matilde Majano).

Many of us fought for the revolution, and many others served in the militias. However, we were tired of the contra war. That is why we wanted to change. You see, in

1989 some people from Managua came to tell us that if doña Violeta would win the elections, the contra war was going to end. "No more contra war", we were told. Many of our young men were in the army against their will. Others fled to Costa Rica just to avoid military conscription. Those were difficult times. We really wanted peace at any price (cc. Jacinto Matus).

Although near the end of the 1980s, the relationship between Veracruceños and Sandinistas had improved considerably, and many Veracruceños were content with the government policies, they were also tired of the state of war. The contra war had claimed the lives of some of their children. Many Veracruceños saw in Violeta Chamorro a concrete opportunity to end the war and return to peaceful times.

"Despite many mistakes", as Tomás Borge, former Sandinista Cabinet Minister, told me, "the Sandinista government [briefly] brought material, intellectual, and social progress to most Nicaraguans. Massive literacy campaigns, permanent *crusadas médicas* (medical crusades), and a thorough agrarian reform were among the most remarkable achievements" (personal communication). Unfortunately, while the government was busy dealing with important, urgent internal matters, it was also defending the nation from the U.S. backed contra aggression. By 1984, with the financial aid of the U.S. to undermine the Sandinistas revolutionary efforts, upwards of fifteen thousand contras were harassing the Nicaraguan government by destroying national infrastructure through constant military hostility (Walker 2003). More than fifty percent of the national budget went towards war efforts, while internal issues and domestic matters were increasingly neglected due to the urgency of the war. Conscription became compulsory. The era of peace and progress, which the Sandinistas had envisioned, became a time of brutal war and material scarcity. The U.S. had imposed an economic embargo on Nicaragua and declared a war by proxy (Walker 2003).

Although the Reagan and Bush administrations consistently defied public opinion and the concerted effort of most Latin American countries to achieve peace, their tenacious policy of low intensity conflict against Nicaragua eventually paid off (Walker 2003: 195). After watching their government for more than a decade striving to achieve peace while preserving sovereignty, on February 15, 1990, a majority of Nicaraguan voters opted for peace through other means (Walker 2003). Many people in Veracruz also felt the same way. The UNO's (National Opposition Union) presidential candidate Violeta Barrios de Chamorro offered an end to the contra war if (she) won the elections. Only two months after Chamorro's presidential inauguration, U.S. hegemony took over Nicaragua once again. The contras were formally demobilized, and the economic embargo was quickly terminated (Walker 2003), ending the Sandinista social dream. Veracruceños had mixed feelings about the ending of the Sandinista era. For some it meant going back to conservativism and losing some of the social, economic, and health benefits that were accomplished by the Sandinistas. To others, it was a new opportunity filled with new political promises of better times ahead for the Indigenous people in Nicaragua.

Back to Conservatism and New Political Promises

The end of the Sandinista administration meant the end of the contra war and the U.S. economic embargo, but it also meant the end of numerous economic, social, educational, agricultural, and health programs for Nicaragua and its Indigenous people. For many Veracruceños, the promises of a brighter economic and social future were not as bright as they thought they would be. In Veracruz, as elsewhere, agricultural cooperatives were dismantled. Much of the land obtained through the agrarian reform went back to their former owners (Hoyt 1997). Agricultural machinery was abandoned due to lack of parts and service. Seed and fertilizer went back to unsubsidized prices. Infant mortality and infectious diseases increased and medical services decreased. Apart from giving back to the community some of the rights that the Sandinistas had suspended, such as collecting local land and business taxes and some administrative autonomy, the Chamorro's administration did not deliver much of what it had promised to the Indigenous people and to Nicaraguans in general.

From the symbolic point of view, having gained control again over the collection of local taxes is important. From the economic point of view, it is not much. In truth, land and business taxes represent modest revenue for the community. For example, we only have around 20 small businesses in the community, and each of them only pays $25.00 córdobas a month. It isn't much. However, it is a matter of principle. Otherwise, we are not doing any better than before. Indigenous people in this country continue to be largely ignored as usual. Our struggle continues even more vigorously. None of the political and economic promises has been realized (ccl. Alex Morales.).

Many of us thought that by ending the contra war and eliminating military conscription our youth was not going to leave the community any more. Nevertheless, it *was not like that. Before they* [Veracruceño youth] *were running away from the war. Now they are running way from poverty and lack of local opportunities. Life has become more expensive. Now young people feel they have no economic future here* (ccl. Martín Ulloa)

It seemed that, save a few cosmetic changes, the Chamorro administration brought back the "era of conservatism" for Nicaragua. The gap between the poor and the wealthy increased as subsidies were terminated. Poverty increased in rural and Indigenous areas, as the only programs for material progress were concentrated in urban settings. The Chamorro years (1990-1997) were truly reactionary in social and economic matters and the poor suffered considerably. As suggested by Walker (2003:58), those years were reactionary rather than conservative because instead of conserving some of the Sandinista achievements, the new administration was trying to go back to an imagined past.

After the presidency of Violeta de Chamorro, Arnoldo Alemán was elected president as the new UNO candidate. In 2002, Enrique Bolaños won the presidency with a Liberal majority in coalition with the Conservative party. Veracruceños see no substantial political or economic changes through the years since Violeta Chamorro was elected president and the current president. It all represents a single era for them.

The Emergence a more Belligerent Indigenous Movement

As noted by Niezen (2003:40), when the League of Nations was replaced with the United Nations, after World War II, conditions that are more favorable for the recognition of Indigenous peoples rights began to emerge, particularly through the Universal Declaration of Human Rights ratified in 1948. Similar humanitarian (in their own historic contexts) efforts were made by the International Labour Organization (ILO) in the 1950's. Furthermore, the creation of the pan-Indigenous organization in the 1960s in the United States, coalesced into lobbying groups capable of sending leaders to international forums and raise awareness of human rights violations of Indigenous peoples. This international recognition, among other aspects such as the emergence of an educated elite of Indigenous leaders, in some ways set the conditions that stimulated more militant forms of political activism among Indigenous groups. The struggles for Indigenous identity and recognition of human rights became increasingly prominent in their countries of origin and in the international arena. Niezen has pointed out that "the growth of reinvigorating identity as a source of group membership and the pursuit of distinct rights to protect identity boundaries have increased almost exponentially during the past decades" (2003:6).

In Nicaragua, these international conditions combined with national political activism. Perhaps one of the most politically significant legacies left by the Sandinistas to Veracruceños was a new culture of political militancy. Nationally, the Sandinista revolution created a wide militant movement that catapulted important social and political organizations of women, workers, youth, professional, clergy, artisans, artists, intellectuals and Indigenous people. The Sandinistas overly promoted a "new radical thought on participatory democracy" (Hoyt 1997:78). People learned important skills of "*organizational power*" (Wolf 1994) and put it into action. A more politically militant class immerged among Indigenous people. It was in this context that in the 1990s, important national and international Indigenous organizations were formed in Veracruz and all over Nicaragua. Since the early 1990', the people of Veracruz together with other Indigenous people founded the Consejos Regionales de los Pueblos Indígenas Pacífico Centro Norte (the Regional Councils of Indigenous Peoples from the Pacific, Central and North). This organization includes the following Indigenous movements: Monéxico Nahua del Pueblo Indígena Veracruz del Zapotal, Rivas; Movimiento Indígena de Jinotega (MIJ); Movimiento Indígena Nahuas y Chorotega (MINCH); Monéxico Chorotega; el Pueblo Indígena de San Lucas, Madriz; Consejo de Líderes Indígenas de Las Salinas Nahualapa, and the Indigenous Communities of Nacimí and el Turtugal. In turn, this organization is member of the Consejos Regionales de los Pueblos Indígenas Pacífico Centro Norte (the Regional Council of Indigenous Peoples from the Pacific, Central and North), as well as of the Convergence of Movements of the People of the Américas (COMPA), which also a member of the Indigenous Parliament, founded in Panama City in 1987, with the participation of Indigenous parliaments from Argentina, Bolivia, Columbia, Ecuador, Guatemala, México, Nicaragua and Pamaná. The Parliamentary main office is located in Managua, Nicaragua, since 1988.

Nicaraguan Indigenous political activism also enjoys the support of progressive organizations and institutions in the country, including the Sandinista party and the Nicaraguan Autonomous National University, whose department of History in 2003 conducted a research project called "Strengthening Indigenous Identity for Sustainable Development". One of the main objectives of this project was to expand the knowledge of community leaders from Jinotepe and Veracruz del Zapotal. The Nicaraguan Indigenous movement has been able to gain the support of progressive international organizations. Their struggle for better material and social conditions from the position of an ethnic minority in Nicaragua is now inserted in the context of a globalized arena. In March of 2005, several Indigenous organizations in Nicaraguan including the people of Veracruz, together with over 200 organizations from Nicaragua and around the world, sent a petition to Enrique Iglesias, President of the Inter-American Development Bank, addressed as "Stop Water Privatization in Nicaragua!" (See copy of the letter in the Appendix 2).

The result of the demographic holocaust that began with the conquest is that Nicaragua today, instead of being a predominantly Indigenous country, is essentially mestizo society, almost exclusively Spanish in language and other aspects of culture. The political subjugation of the Indigenous people today is the continuation of the domination they were subjected to by the conquest. Contemporary national international political activism among Indigenous people of Veracruz is the latest expression of their longstanding struggle to persist as distinctive ethnic people.

CONCLUSION

An important objective of this (long) chapter has been to reconstruct a history that serves as a comprehensive background for this study. Above all, I have tried to illustrate significant aspects about the origins, migration, history, social conditions, and struggles of the historical Nahua people in relation to the contemporary Nahua society of Veracruz. My references to the ancient Nicarao, as a Nahua speaking society occupying the Isthmus of Rivas at the time of the Spanish invasion, are made only in relation to how Veracruceños see themselves as the historical continuity of these people. Understanding the ancestor's history of Veracruceños as being related to Nahua culture helps us grasp, with greater clarity, their current condition and struggle for identity. The series of social events, conditions, relations, actions, and people as part of a dialectical history I have addressed in this chapter, set the general background for the historical continuity that defines Veracruceños. Theoretically, the events I have discussed here constitute the historical particularities that in some ways explain the present conditions of the Indigenous people in Nicaragua in general, and those of Veracruceños in particular. Their historical struggle to survive as Indigenous people conceptually frames more than 500 years of Indigenous resistance to non-Indigenous hegemony; a theme so pervasively present in both the historical memory and the present orientation of their struggle.

For the sake of clarity, I have artificially separated the historical continuum into discrete sections or periods, when in fact, Veracruceños perceived their history as an ever-flowing continuity of events. Despite the different social and historical conditions that have shaped what is Nicaragua today, Veracruceños believe that, from their condition of Indigenous people in an overwhelming non-Indigenous society, the last 500 years have been in essence the same. Borrowing a structuralist analytical model of *plus ça change…* the more things have changed the more they have remained the same for Veracruceños.

While the whites and the mestizos have been fighting among themselves for economic and political power, we've been struggling for self-determination, identity and our natural right to survive as Indigenous people. Many revolutions, deaths, and struggles later, things continue to be essentially the same for us. For different *circumstances, the Nicarao people took two different historical paths. Some groups mixed their culture and blood with whites and blacks and became mestizos, other groups, in this case us, chose to keep and defend their ancestral blood, kinship and culture* (ccl. Pedro Gonzáles).

The construction of an ethnically meaningful past … "is a project that selectively organizes events in a relation of continuity with a contemporary subject, thereby creating an appropriated representation of a life leading up to the present, that is, a life history fashioned in the act of self-definition" (Friedman 1994:117). It is clear that Veracruceños construct their history by speaking about it; "in speech history is made" (Sahlins 1995:5). Veracruceños' historical memories of their Indigenous struggle are, beyond its human tragedy, symbols of their identity. As argued by Sahlins (1995:5), signs are set in various and contingent relationships according to people's instrumental purposes as socially constituted. Signs, he claims, "take on functional and implicational values in a project of action, not merely the mutual determination of a synchronic state" (1995:5). For Veracruceños, the history of the Nahua people in Nicaragua represents a material and social reality but is also a symbolic representation of their own ethnic history, identity, and culture. Past events are made relevant to the present through cultural categories of continuity. Thus, claiming a Nahua identity through historical reconstruction is validating the continuity of a cultural category called identity, as it relates to Veracruceños' particular modes of interpretation and actions. As Sahlins (1995:67) said, "people act upon circumstances according to their own cultural presuppositions, the socially given categories of persons and things".

For Veracruceños, adopting Sahlins' model, the value of being an Indigenous person is truly constituted in a system of signs, which they use and experience as the names of things, events, relations, and ideas. Therefore, the significance of these experiences, events, relations and ideas are subjected to analysis and recombination from which arise unprecedented forms and meanings expressed in metaphors. Identity is thus a historical metaphor for *continuity*. By focusing on particular things, events, relations, persons and ideas about their past, Veracruceños seem to be making structural arrangements of what constitute their history. In this regard, they see their history as a significant set of past symbols that continue to be meaningful in their present, as they see it manifested in the material, social and ideational life of their community. As argued by Sahlins, (1995:7), culture may set conditions to the historical process, "but it is dissolved and reformulated in material practice, so that history becomes the realization, in the form of society, of the actual resources people put into play".

Situating Veracruceños in the larger historical, geographic, economic and political context of Nicaragua at the beginning of this chapter has better equipped us to understand and contextualize important aspects about their life, struggles and aspirations. The main objective of this chapter has been to provide an overview of the ethnographic settings of this study. It has described both historical and contemporary aspects of the people of Veracruz. With this chapter, I have also tried to give the reader a general sense of what the people and the community of Veracruz are like by briefly describing daily life in the community.

Throughout the remaining chapters, will be shown how the history of the Veracruceños ' struggle and their current strategies to reclaim their Indigenous identity are intimately related to contemporary social, materials and ideational conditions in a globalized Nicaragua. These first two chapters also set the general foundation of the *who, what, why, where* and *when* of my study. I believe that many of the ideas, arguments and conclusions I present in this ethnographic study will be better understood if conceived in light of the general information contained in these introductory chapters.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH PROCEDURE

Chapter overview

This chapter describes the procedure used in gathering the primary data needed to construct this ethnographic research. I begin by situating myself as the ethnographer with the objective of contextualizing my "situated acknowledge" (Harding 1991; Haraway 1991) as an essential and personal variable in the production of this ethnographic work. Subsequently, I address the important issues pertaining to why and how I came to conduct the research in Nicaragua in general, and Veracruz in particular. A detailed description of the process of data collection comprises the core of this chapter. Specific information on participant observation, interviewing techniques, note taking, key cultural consultants, rapport building, community consent, and the particular social and physical settings where I carried out the research are also central themes in this chapter. In addition, issues of translation, literature review, and validation problems are critically addressed. I conclude this chapter by clarifying the reasons for referring to this section as research procedure instead of research methodology, as is typically referred to.

Situating the Ethnographer

Whether or not we, as anthropologists, situate ourselves in the text, ethnographic writing is always (inescapably) about the anthropologist and the people being studied. Reflexivity, critically thinking about the way we think, is essential in ethnographic writing even in the absence of our acknowledgement, which is characterized by our futile disregard for our own intersubjectivity embedded in both the production and the context of the manuscript itself (Crapanzano 1980, 1992). By being aware of and willing to address my own personal involvement in the production of this dissertation, I realize, in a self-reflexive fashion, my position as a gendered, ethnic, class and culture subject, and I understand how the dialectic of fieldwork (Rabinow 1977) influences my "writing-up" of culture (Clifford and Marcus 1986). As an ethnographer "objectively" researching and writing about a culture, I realize that I am also "writing Culture" (Clifford 1988). That is to say, I realize that I constitute the cultural realities even as I attempt to describe them, simply because I cannot escape my own cultural subjectivity. Therefore, the anthropological authority to speak of the Veracruceños' identity, history, medicine, boundaries and aspirations does not stem from a privileged position. Rather, it comes from the ethnographic and procedural encounter between the Veracruceños' willingness to tell me their stories and my interest in attentively listing to them. It comes from an ongoing dialogue between my cultural consultants and me. As a result, I have written down their stories in the way I interpret them from my own particular gendered, social, historical, political, educational and class subject position (See Haraway 1991 for a discussion of situated knowing).

Having said that I begin by saying that I was born and raised (mestizo) in El Salvador, Central America and came to Canada as a political refugee in my late teens, after my mother was kidnapped and killed by the National Guard. Even though I have lived in Canada for the last 22 years, I am still very attached to my Central American cultural roots and people. At home, we speak Spanish since my wife is also Salvadorian. Given this personal history, I have been interested in studying the Central American region for over a decade. By conducting ethnographic research in El Salvador between 1993 and 1999, I learned how Indigenous people in that country were reaffirming their precariously kept Indigenous identity through the revival and reclamation of their Indigenous medicine. Soon I realized this was a regional trend. Although in different degrees, Indigenous people in Honduras, Mexico, Costa Rica and Nicaragua were also engaged in similar processes. The following are the names of the publications that came as a result of some Indigenous gatherings organized to discuss issues of Indigenous medicine and identity. Most are known in Spanish as encuentros médicos (medical encounters). II Encuentro Internacional de Medicina Indígena Costa Rica 1998; Memorias del I Seminario de Medicina Tradicional de Honduras 1984; 1989 - Memorias del Cuarto Encuentro de Medicos Indígenas del Estado de Chiapas - Organización de Médicos Indígenas del Estado de Chiapas (OMIECH) - México). (II Encuentro Internacional de Medicina Indígena Costa Rica 1998; Memorias del I Seminario de Medicina Tradicional de Honduras 1984; 1989 - Memorias del Cuarto Encuentro de Medicos Indígenas del Estado de Chiapas - Organización de Médicos Indígenas del Estado de Chiapas (OMIECH) - México).

Initially, my Ph.D. research proposal focused on the emergence of Indigeneity in El Salvador and the current strategies utilized by Indigenous people to reclaim their identity. Given my particular interest in medical anthropology, I was concerned with how the current re-emergence of Indigenous identity and culture in El Salvador was accompanying a revival of Indigenous medicine (Movimiento Autóctono Indígena Salvadoreño MAIS, 1999). However, after successfully defending my candidacy exam in April 2001, family issues of security forced me to change my original plans.

Why Indigenous People from Nicaragua?

During the end of 2000 and the beginning of 2001, the kidnapping of children in El Salvador was a serious threat to virtually every member of Salvadorian society. It was not only the children of the rich and famous who were being abducted this time, anyone who could pay at least one thousand U.S. dollars was considered an easy target. My wife Cecilia and I became extremely concerned about the safety of our one-year-old son, Amaury. Children coming from abroad, particularly the U.S., Canada and Europe were thought of as rich, easy targets for organized crime. Furthermore, the major earthquakes of January and February 2001 that shook and devastated a great part of El Salvador, unleashed an epidemic of infectious respiratory diseases that posed a threat, specifically to our son. Personally, I was ready and willing to undergo any risks; however, I was not willing to subject my family to unnecessary danger. In light of all this, I urgently needed to find a different, yet relatively similar cultural, geographical setting to conduct my research. At the time, Nicaragua seemed to be the most suitable alternative as it offered similar opportunities by being regionally, linguistically, historically, and ethnically similar to El Salvador. Above all, it was (and still is) one of the safest countries in Central America. In addition, I had the advantage of having some important personal and academic connections in Nicaragua. Furthermore, we had relatives living in the city of Rivas. They had also offered to help us find accommodation and key contacts to carry out the study. These reasons, as well as other personal, family concerns, helped me decide to do this research in Nicaragua. Although changing the cultural and geographical settings was a serious matter that demanded some modifications to the original proposal, it did not alter, in any significant way, my initial research interests and objectives. Furthermore, I felt equally competent, linguistically and culturally, to conduct my research in Nicaragua, as I would have in El Salvador.

Meeting the Community

My family and I arrived in Nicaragua on September 17, 2001. For the first couple of days, I tried to get a general sense of life in Nicaragua and learn more about the general conditions of the Indigenous people in the Pacific Coast region. The same week, we visited several Indigenous communities in the region with the purpose of finding a suitable community where I could conduct the ethnographic research. We made several key contacts during this time, but were unable to find a community that fit my research interests (photographs of my family in the field are available in the Appendix 3).

Somewhat disappointed, we were ready to move to the Atlantic region of the country, when one of our relatives opportunely told us about the Indigenous community of Veracruz. As she started to describe the community, I gradually began to realize that Veracruz met the requirement for my study. It seemed to have the potential for meeting my research interests and objectives. In particular, I was looking for a historically established Indigenous community that was actively engaged in reclaiming and revitalizing its identity, particularly through the usage of Indigenous medicine. Veracruz presented those characteristics.

The following morning I went to Veracruz on the only bus that travels to the community. On my way to the village, I met a fifty-year-old teacher named Estela Chamorro, who had been teaching in Veracruz for the last fifteen years. Although Estela was not an Indigenous person, she became my first contact in the community. During the twenty-minute ride, we talked about my ethnographic research interest in the community. She received my idea with such enthusiasm that she immediately gave me the name and address of the president of the community, Alex Morales. As I arrived, after the bus dropped me off near his place, I stood at the front gate where I introduced myself and politely asked for Mr. Alex Morales. "Yes, I am Alex, and I'll be right there", a young man assured me loudly, but cordially, while he waved his right hand in a greeting gesture. He was taking a shower in a roofless bathroom with walls that stretched only up to his neck. It was an extremely hot day. I noticed Alex was getting the water from a deep, dark well. Wild flowers and colorful garden-bushes richly spilled over his land. The bathroom was midway between the front gate and a humble one-story dwelling made of bricks and wood. A tall, fair skin, handsome woman, who I learned was Alex's mother, came from the house and politely asked me to come in and wait inside. While I was waiting, she brought me some *chicha de maíz*, a local cold, sweet drink, made of corn that I apprehensively drank. Since I knew there was no drinking water in the village, my apprehension was not gratuitous. I was sick that evening with the first of several severe intestinal infections I would endure during my fieldwork.

Freshly clean, handsomely dressed, and emanating a gentle, soothing cologne, Alex finally came to meet with me. I was surprised to see such a young man in a central, powerful position, particularly in a culture that highly values and relies on their elders for leadership and advice. Alex was a twenty-four-year old university student when I first met him. I eventually learned how my surprise was justified. The local friar had promoted Alex to be the president of community with the aim of, according to Alex himself, manipulating him as young and inexperienced community leader. During the 2000 municipal elections in Rivas, Alex and the local priest became political enemies. The friar was overtly supporting the Liberal, while Alex and his youth group supported the Sandinistas. This animosity between the two trickled down to other social and religious spheres in the life of the community.

Alex's positive, contagious, youthful manner is what made him so agreeable. While we were busy chatting, he displayed articulacy and intelligence as we talked for over two hours. This was my first informal interview with an Indigenous leader in the community. I gave him detailed information about my ethnographic research project and interest in the community. He certainly welcomed my presence and research plans but explained to me that he did not have the authority to allow me to work in the community. The Monéxico and la Directiva, of which he was president, had to formally give me permission. He assured me it was merely a formality and that he did not foresee any objections. I left quite optimistic. I had found my community.

Getting Community Consent

Four days after I met Alex, I went back to Veracruz and met with members of the Monéxico and of la Directiva. I came with my family and brought some treats as a polite courtesy. The meeting took place during a prolonged break at a construction site where community leaders were working on the installation of a drinking water pump donated by the International Red Cross. After formal introductions, they asked me what exactly I wanted from them. I explained how I sought to conduct ethnographic research in their community in order to write a dissertation as partial requirement for obtaining a Ph.D. degree at the University of Alberta. Some of them certainly welcomed and approved the idea of having a researcher study their community. They believed it was a great opportunity for them to tell me their story, so that I could tell it to any one who would listen. Alfredo López, however, the most culturally conservative militant of the group, was skeptical of my motives and inquisitively addressed me for about an hour. For instance, he asked me:

> *How do we know that you are not going to be like the people who came from a U.S. university last year, who took samples of our hair and left without giving much explanation? We are concerned that many people come from the rich capitalist countries, use us and leave without giving any benefit to the community. How do we know that you are not working for a pharmaceutical company; or that you are not going to steal our ancestral medical wisdom; or that you won't leave the community without giving anything in return? (ccl. Alfredo Lopez.).*

His skepticism was justifiable. I patiently listened to his concerns and assured him that my ethnographic research would lead to a long-term relationship between the community and me. To Alfredo, I was only a perfect stranger who was trying to get something out of the community with the dubious intention of giving something in return. Although Alfredo had been inflexibly defensive, by the end of the afternoon, my family (a child and his mother have enchanting power) and I finally convinced Alfredo López of my genuine interest in establishing a long-term community-ethnographer relationship and above all, that I was not working for any pharmaceutical company. Ironically, Alfredo, who was my most hostile detractor, became my best friend and one of the most important cultural consultants for my research.

As suggested by Young-Leslie (2005 personal communication), the immediacy of electronic media has changed the effect of 'distance' and 'isolation' that the ethnographer experiences while in the field. Thus, in consultation by e-mail with my supervisor, I agreed to draft and sign a research agreement, which stipulated the rules, limitations, obligations, as well as the rights and benefits the community would obtain from my ethnographic research. After I wrote the first draft, Alfredo, Pedro Guzmán and some other leaders added a few minor changes. Following a series of meetings and amendments, we all finally signed the agreement. The agreement, which took roughly two weeks to finalize, was essentially a written consent of the community, formally allowing me to carry out my ethnographic research along with my pledge to uphold the ethical and legal standards of the community. As an example, they expected me to produce a comprehensive population survey, which I eventually did. Above all, I had to guarantee that my research would not contravene the traditional, national and international laws and norms established for the protection and respect of Indigenous people. The agreement also included statements of the ethical procedures required by the ethics review committee. A copy of the original agreement and can be found in the Appendix 4.

Getting Government Permission

After having obtained community permission to conduct the ethnographic research, I still needed government permission to remain in the country for the duration of the study. During my second week in Nicaragua, in a meeting with one of the most prominent historians in Rivas, Dr. Valdez, I was introduced to Noel Carcache, the then director of the National Heritage Office. Mr. Carcache was a young, bright, articulate lawyer, who eventually became my friend. He gave me important academic and legal support throughout my stay in Nicaragua. Thanks to his assistance, we were able to extend our visas numerous times, we had access to special libraries and archives, participated in important academic and cultural events, and met a wide range of historians and other scholars. Nominally, I became a temporary research associate at the National Heritage Office. Thus, I was officially permitted to carry out my research, by the Nicaraguan Government, based solely on the condition that I would make the results of my study available to the National Heritage Office.

To access my scholarship stipend, I needed to make monthly trips to Managua. During that monthly trip I was repeatedly stopped at a police checkpoint between Rivas and Managua; however, I was always immediately released after presenting a personal letter from the director of the National Heritage Office. Having this important government connection did not excuse us from paying immigration fees and other related expenses but it gave us the necessary security and legal authorization to conduct the research.

Living Arrangements while Researching

Once the Nicaraguan Government and community leaders formally allowed me to carry out the ethnographic research, my family and I started looking for a permanent dwelling. For the first two weeks in Nicaragua, we had stayed at the house of one of my wife's aunts. Since there was no adequate space available in Veracruz for my whole family, we had to stay in Rivas, where we rented a little house and hired a woman to take care of our son. We ended up moving out of this house due to safety problems as it was close to a creek, from which poisonous snakes would crawl into our place at night. We found two coral snakes inside our place in one month. To our disadvantage, the closest medical post with the coral antidote was in Costa Rica, forty minutes away by car. Furthermore, this trip would entail going through the bureaucratic nightmare of having to cross the border between Nicaragua and Costa Rica. As a preventive measure, we looked for another place, and found one that seemed to offer better living conditions, still in Rivas.

Rivas, the head district of Veracruz and other communities, is located four and a half kilometers away from Veracruz, which is only 15 minutes by car, 20 by bus, 25 by bike, or 35 to 50 on foot. The road is bumpy, entwined mountainous. Aside from the deadly poisonous snakes languidly crossing the road one would frequently encounter, the trip on foot was relatively safe and pleasant. Corals and rattlesnakes were among the most commonly found snakes. For the first month, my wife and I would walk to the village. However, after a few close and frightful encounters with these creatures, we decided to travel by bus and bicycle. On several occasions, our son accompanied us to the village. Most of the time, however, Ofelia Durán a 29 year old mestizo women, would baby-sit him at our place in Rivas (see Flinn et al. 1998 for a thorough discussion on issues of family and fieldwork). Although we would travel daily to Veracruz, at least twice a week I would spend the night in the village in order to get a more holistic perspective of family and social life. I typically stayed at Pedro's place, situated on top of a hill over looking the village. However, at times when requested by other members of the community, I would spend the night at their places.

Participant Observation

All the primary data for this ethnographic research was collected through participant observation. Although I conducted research as a participant observer, mainly in the village of Veracruz, I spent a significant amount of time in all its comarcas. Taking into account that all participant observation is fieldwork, but not all fieldwork is participant observation (Bernard 1998), I define my participant observation in terms of five central characteristics described below. Procedurally, based on a phenomenological and hermeneutic (Husserl 1970) approach (characteristics 4 and 5 respectively), my participant observation can be characterized by an ongoing process of:

1) Building rapport and networking with key informants.
2) Merging into the community in such a way that, in spite of my presence, people went about doing their business as usual.
3) Culturally immersing into the village's way of life.
4) Directly observing people's relations and actions in order to produce convincing descriptions of what I have experienced rather than explanations and causes.
5) Constantly studying free-flowing acts of people and construing those acts as if they were text whose internal meanings can be discovered by proper exegesis (Biesele and Tyler 1986).

Figure 1.3 Pedro Gonzales' place (where I would usually stay in Veracruz).

As an ongoing process, participant observation lasted the entire sixteen months of field research conducted between September 2001 and December 2002. Once local authorities formally allowed me to start the study, I began building a close network of key cultural consultants. Out of the seven women and ten men who formed this team of key cultural consultants, five were healers, seven were community leaders, and the remaining five were labourers from the community.

Throughout my field research, I relied on them to inform me of the general local knowledge, beliefs, and history. I chose them not only because they seemed to be very knowledgeable about their culture, but also because of their genuine enthusiasm and willingness to participate in this study. It took me two months to complete the key consultant team. I would meet daily with different members and occasionally with the whole group.

Figure 2.3 People during a Catholic mass in Veracruz (2002).

The meetings were always pleasant and very informative. In general, the context of these meetings was based on my questions, and general inquisitiveness about their culture, but guided by my particular interest in the use of Indigenous medicine to claim identity. The diagram on the following page is intended to give a visual overview of the main procedural scheme of this ethnographic research.

GATHERING THE DATA

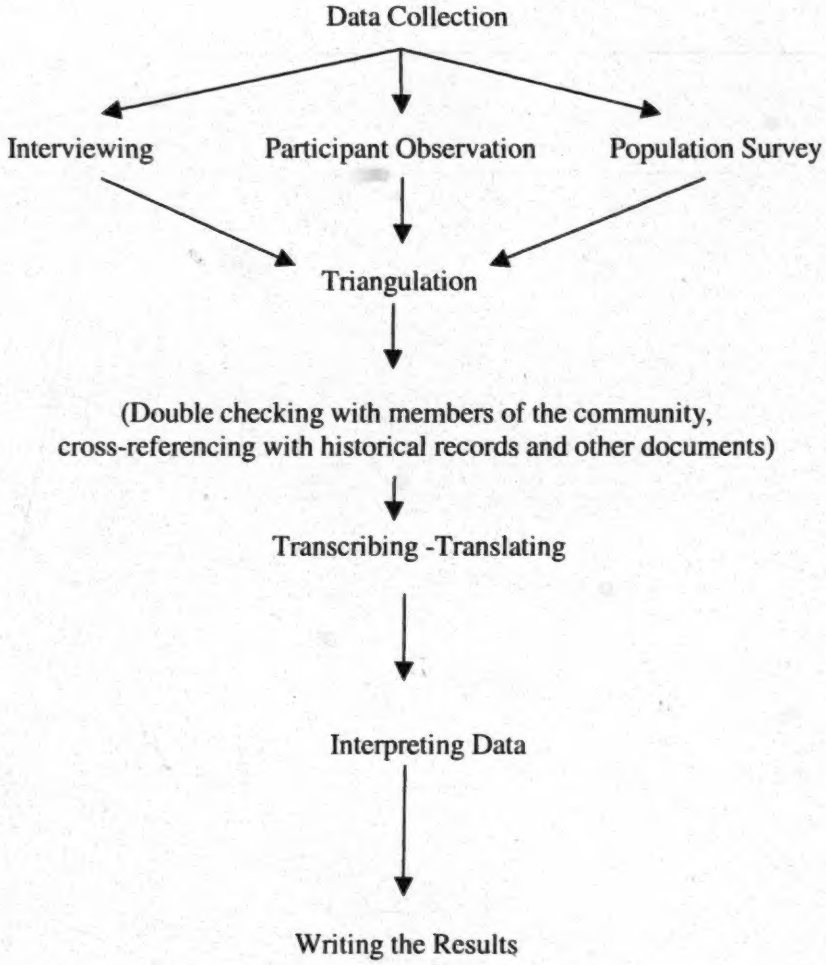
Data Collection
Interviewing
Participant Observation
Population Survey
Triangulation
(Double checking with members of the community,
cross-referencing with historical records and other documents)
Transcribing -Translating
Interpreting Data
Writing the Results

Figure 3.3 Conceptual Diagram of the Procedural Scheme

Interviewing

This dissertation is based on the fifteen months of ethnographic research gathered in Veracruz between September 2001 and December 2002. During this time, I conducted numerous unstructured, semi-structured, and open-ended interviews, twenty-five of which were with healers, forty with community leaders, twenty with elders, and approximately four hundred with ordinary community members. I also interviewed, on occasion, several non-Indigenous people, including two historians, three physicians, five nurses and seven ordinary Nicaraguans. All interviewees were given a verbal overview of the general objectives of the study. Some interviews were video-recorded and audio-recorded, while others were written on paper. As the most widely used method of data collection in cultural anthropology (Bernard 1998), I relied mainly on unstructured interviews except for the population survey, for which I used semi-structured interviews. Depending on the interviewee, interviews were designed to elicit informative narratives regarding community history, issues of identity, Indigenous medical ideas and practices, the threat of the mestizo culture, globalization and witchcraft. Other central themes include:

- Community identity and history
- Indigenous struggles for survival
- Mestizo threat to Indigenous identity and culture
- Indigenous medicine as a cultural expression
- Territoriality and Indigeneity
- Markers of identity

- Healers as cultural agents
- Medicine and ideas of selfhood
- Indigenous national unity through medicine
- Misfortune as an Indigenous illness category
- Social agents of illness
- Local pharmacopoeia and etiological theories
- Indigenous resistance and national cultural hegemony
- Indigenous medicine and the re-emergence of Indigenous identity, social pride, and culture (Samples questions are provided in the Appendix 5).

Although I took most of my notes during the course of the day, I further contextualized the interviews by recording information at the end of each day, including my observations and thoughts, the physical environment, daily activities I participated in, and my ideas on how all of this related to my research objectives. I oriented my interviews around the current struggle to assert Indigenous identity and culture and how this struggle is accompanied by a revival of Indigenous medical ideas and practices.

The structured interviews I conducted, with participants, were equally useful for my survey as well as in other occasions. For example, by using structured interviews, I was able to ask my informants to respond to identical sets of questions in order to appreciate how similar stimuli could trigger either different or comparable outcomes. These types of interviews were especially helpful for issues involving identity and the construction of misfortune as local medical category. Because not all my informants were literate, some times I had to read the questionnaires to them. Eighty people in total participated in the structured interviews, including thirty-six women and forty-four men. These interviews centered on issues related to Indigenous medicine, identity, and community history. I conducted these interviews with a broad range of people, including community leaders, household heads, older children, local teachers, religious leaders, local business owners, agricultural workers, healers, midwifes, bonesetters, local cantinas or drinking spaces owners, sport leaders, professionals, and migrants. The interviews lasted between fifteen minutes and three hours and were conducted in a variety of settings depending on the hour and the day. I always let my consultants decide where and when to conduct the interview. Several interviews took place at the interviewees' home and work place. Others interviews were carried out in public places, such as the central plaza, local cantinas, the church's atrium, the baseball field, the cemetery, the small community hall, or simply on street corners where people informally meet. I also interviewed people during recreational activities, public dances, private parties, or religious activities and community celebrations.

To complement the one-on-one interviews, I organized five meetings with local youth groups, community leaders, healers, and women's groups. The topics discussed during these meetings also focused on issues related to Indigenous medicine and identity. As a minor incentive, I always brought refreshments to the meetings. After people met me through these formal gatherings, they started to receive me in their homes as an old friend, rather than a distant researcher. These meetings enabled me to build better rapport and to establish a familiar connection with people of the village. These meetings also helped people of the community feel like an important part of the study. Since I could not visit everybody everyday, some individuals complained to me that I was ignoring them by not visiting or interviewing them. These special gatherings also helped to ease these tensions because they allowed me to meet with many people at one time. Furthermore, my fluency in Spanish and my familiarity with the Nicaraguan culture made it easier for my consultants and me to quickly develop a warm and friendly relationship.

The Survey

By the second month of my study, I began conducting a population survey with the help of my wife and a group of twenty students (men and women) from la Universidad Hispanoamericana in Rivas (The Hispano-American University in Rivas). We collected vital statistical information, life and labour histories, migration and marital patterns, religious and witchcraft practices, ideas on identity and local history, and a detailed list of the local classifications of illnesses, remedies, pharmacopoeia, and etiological theories. We concluded the survey by late July 2002. We carried out this survey for two reasons: First, I needed hard data and numbers about the people I was studying. When I arrived in Veracruz, I had no information about the community. This survey helped me to collect reliable and valid population data. I needed to know general demographic information, i.e., how many women, children and men live in the community, number and type of families, religious affiliation as well as general statistic information on local occupations, education, housing, domestic organization, material possessions, agriculture, migration, and many other locally important cultural patterns. Second, the community leaders specifically asked me to provide them with a comprehensive population survey, as a condition allowing me to conduct research in the community. Culturally conservative leaders were particularly keen on having recent general statistics information in order to use it as a supportive document for development projects for the community. At the end the fieldwork, I presented them with a booklet containing all the statistical data I have collected through the fifteen month of research. Veracruceños were satisfied with the survey and expressed that it was "*by far, the most accurate and thorough survey done in the community in the last twenty years*" (ccl. Eliseo Palmar.).

Participant Observation as "Hanging Out"

As Bernard (2002:246) has pointed out, "hanging out", however silly it may sound, is a skill anthropologists must learn in order to carry out excellent participant observation work. Once I felt fairly integrated into the community (at least as I perceived it), which happened after conducting fieldwork for two months, I spent long afternoons visiting church and community male and female leaders, healers, and ordinary members of the community to both chat informally and to interview them formally. On occasion, my interlocutors lead the direction of the discussions during informal talk. However, most of the time, I would contextualize and focus the discussions by asking questions related to community history and to their perceptions on how medicine reflects their identity. In general, most participants were very responsive to and eager to participate in the ethnographic research.

On an ordinary day, I would typically "hang" around the village, chat with people, or help with domestic and agricultural chores. During many informal conversations, people seemed to enjoy teaching me how to cultivate maize, beans and other grains, or tell me about the secrets of Indigenous life, witchcraft, and ancient remedies. Most housewives were particularly keen to show me the medicinal *prodígios* (literally prodigies) of their gardens, and to tell me stories of how their ancestors successfully treated serious illnesses with medicine founds in their backyards. They also told me that they kept their medical tradition alive by maintaining the cultivation of medicinal plants in their gardens.

Rainy days were particularly fruitful for unstructured interviews. People had plenty of time to talk while children were away at school and there was not much to do at home. Early mornings were the most suitable time to accompany people during their agricultural tasks and to carry out informal interviews. The sun felt less radiant and the intense heat was more bearable. Save a meek older woman who did not want to be video-taped, most people seemed to enjoy being on camera, especially since they had the chance to watch themselves on the screen after each recording. The video camera I used had a little monitor where images could be seen immediately. This audio-video recording device was another effective way of building rapport because people were interested in knowing how it worked and in seeing their images right after being videotaped. While remaining sensitive to issues of privacy and secrecy, I only videotaped interviews that the participants authorized.

Specific Ethnographic Settings

As mentioned earlier, all fieldwork undertakings took place during everyday community activities as well as special occasions and public settings. Here, I address some of these settings in more detail by categorizing them as "festive" and “solemn" ones. With the exception of the healing sessions, these settings are different from others in that they are public places as opposed to more private and closed social spaces such as work and households. A festive setting refers to a place and time in which people purposely gather to chat, relax, entertain or enjoy themselves, i.e., at cantinas, private parties, annual religious festivals, baseball field, and public dances. Solemn settings, on the other hand, refers to places and times during which people gather to mourn their dead during wakes and funerals, to celebrate religious services with masses, vigils, chanting, and prayers, or to heal their sick.

Festive Settings

1. Cantinas

In the village, cantinas are set in open hallways in the owner's home. Some feature an old table in the middle, surrounded by many chairs, while others have colorful plastic stools scattered around the hallway. Most cantina owners are older women who serve clients while completing their household chores. Located in humble settings, these cantinas are safe and comfortable social spaces with enjoyable, pleasant atmospheres. Most of the drinking takes place in the early afternoon and at night. Conversations are casual, mainly featuring gossip and joke telling. Sometimes, however, clients talk passionately about local and national politics, agriculture, medicine, marital infidelity, sports (particularly baseball), world affairs, witchcraft, religion, and local gossip.

Since it is mainly older male adults who frequent these cantinas in small numbers (usually less than ten people), personal disputes rarely go beyond a couple of verbal insults that are ambiguously uttered in friendly overtones. In fact, during my whole stay, I never witnessed a single fistfight at any of the cantinas. This is not to say that none had ever taken place. Nevertheless, I was told that only rarely had a fistfight taken place at any of cantinas. Most of the violence takes place among youth during bacanales or big parties.

2. Bacanales

In general, a bacanal is a party. However, in Veracruz it has the connotation of a festive gathering where heavy drinking takes place. Some bacanales are the secular component of larger religious festivities. Others take place as independent occasions. Throughout the year, Veracruceños celebrate two major annual religious festivities as well as several small private and public bacanales. The two most memorable celebrations are: *el día de la Santa Cruz* (the Day of the Holy Cross) and el día de Nuestra Señora de Santa Ana (the day of Our Lady of Santa Ana). Both of which are, by far, the most widely, solemnly celebrated religious events in the community. Although religious in principle, these events also have an important secular festive component. After the mass and other religious services have taken place, a carnival-like parade goes around the village ending in a crowded public dance at the village's central plaza. A disc jockey, usually from Rivas, is hired for the dance where loudspeakers and psychedelic lights are placed around the central plaza. The latest tropical music hits set the mood in the community, which can be heard all over the village for hours, though usually lasting from seven at night until two in the morning. Beer, rum, and food are sold to raise funds for the coming year's celebration. People from the five Indigenous comarcas as well as from Rivas and other close-by towns such as Tola and Las Piedras, San Rafael, gather every year for these celebrations. In comparison to small bacanales, and perhaps due to their underlying religious nature, these celebrations are relatively peaceful.

In comparison, small bacanales can be violent. I personally witnessed such violence on one occasion during a small bacanal, comprised of mostly young people, organized by an ad-hoc committee to raise funds for the local baseball team. Two hours after the party had begun, a fight broke-out and one of my young cultural consultants was seriously wounded. It was a bloody fight, apparently triggered by witchcraft accusations (In chapter V, I further discuss issues of witchcraft and conflicts in Veracruz). According to my cultural consultants, these confrontations always put an end to bacanales, sending everyone home with a sour taste and a sense of unaccomplished fun. Regrettably, some have even ended in death. In the early 1990's, a teenage boy killed another one in a small bacanal. However, not all public bacanales end in violent confrontations, indeed, this was very rare.

Small bacanales also differ from big annual celebrations in that they are not institutionalized; they take place in more humble settings, they can be privately or publicly organized by anybody at anytime, and they are always smaller than the major celebrations. Beer, rum, and food can sometimes be sold during these parties as part of the fundraising activity. Other times, they are given away free during private celebrations, usually birthdays, baptisms, and patron Saint's days. Typically, these bacanales involve drinking, dancing, eating, and joke telling. Sometimes, however, a leader may start a political and philosophical conversation, and invite others to participate. I was asked, on several occasions, for my opinion on matters, such as globalization, capitalism, socialism, Sandinismo and Indigenous rights, among many other topics during several small bacanales.

In addition to ordinary daily activities, festivals have also provided important ethnographic information and a circumstantial sense of social intimacy, where ideas are freely expressed and discussed in an extraordinary ambiance. I gathered a substantial amount of data about the community and its people through these types of spontaneous, informal gatherings, as well as from formally set meetings designed to deliberately discuss particular and serious issues. "Hanging out" at the local cantinas as well as at small and big bacanales was an additional way of building rapport with members of the community.

Solemn Settings

1. Wakes and Funerals

Given the emotionally charged display of community sorrow during wakes and funerals, participant observation was always difficult in these settings; yet, they were important occasions to learn about local mortuary rituals and patterns of grieving. Mourning rituals were especially revealing in terms of social and kinship networks, and of patterns and mechanisms of inter-community medical knowledge exchange. In Veracruz, death was always intimately linked with succumbing to illness or misfortune. Regrettably, ten community members died in the community during the period of my fieldwork; a young man was killed accidentally by one of his own siblings during a fight at a small bacanal; another Veracruceño had a dreadful bicycle crash that broke his neck; a young teenager was killed by neurocysticercosis caused by eating contaminated pork;

two other youths died of mysterious causes while in Costa Rica; and the rest, mainly children and elders, died from infectious and chronic illnesses, particularly diabetes and *moto* (tetanus).

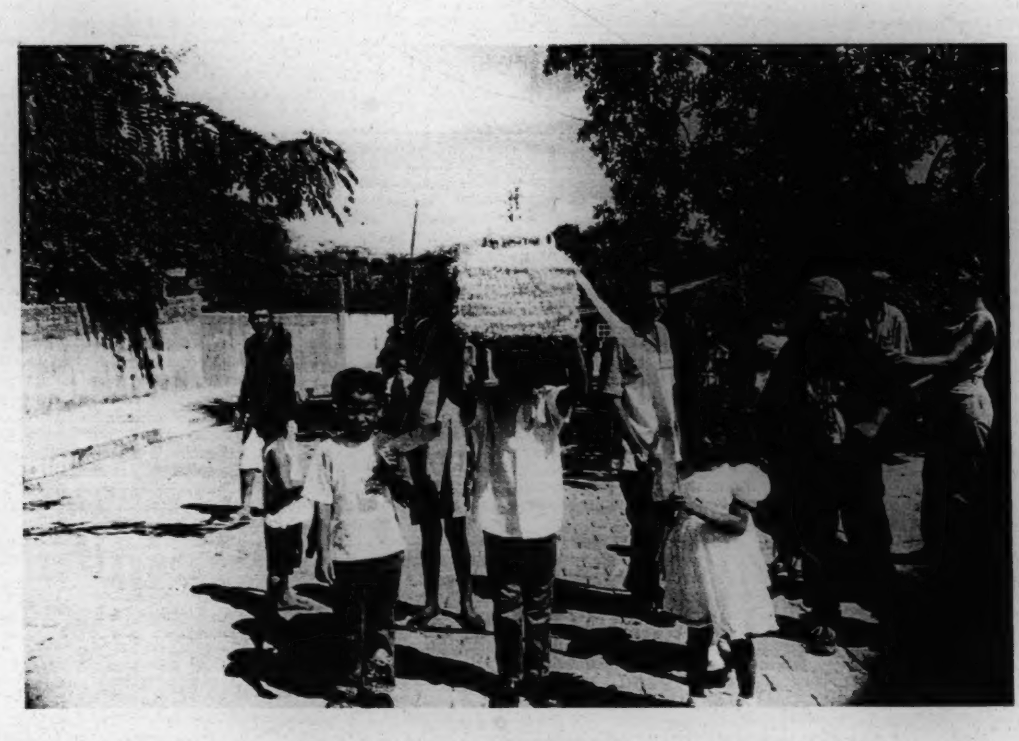

Figure 4.3 Funeral of a baby girl who died from *moto* in 2002.

Attending the wakes and the funerals for some of these people solidified the relation of solidarity and siblinghood between the community and my family and me. As the community shared its sorrow with us, we expressed our deepest sympathy for their irreparable loss. By participating in people's emotional lives, death brought us closer to the community, and somewhat reduced our status as outsiders.

2. Masses and other Religious Services

There are two kinds of Catholic masses in Veracruz: solemn ones taking place during the annual celebrations of the Day of the Holy Cruz and the Day of Our Lady of Santa Ana, and ordinary masses, which are those celebrated during funerals, weddings, and on regular Sundays. Solemn masses are always flashy, crowded events. Musicians from Rivas or elsewhere are hired to sing during the mass. Fancy curtains and ornaments, specifically bought for the occasion, are used in decorating the church. Most of the village members come to these masses, and most people come wearing new clothes. The Rivas priest, specially invited to these occasions, usually leads these solemn masses. Procedurally, participant observation in these religious settings permitted me to meet local religious leaders and helped me gain community trust.

In comparison to solemn masses, ordinary masses are less crowded and more humble. There are no musicians; the local friar always leads them. These masses can take place any day of the year but ordinarily on Sundays. During my fieldwork, I went to all the solemn masses and attended several ordinary ones. Both types of masses provided me with a good opportunity for participant observation. Heated confrontations between community leaders and the Rivas' priest over community authority in religious affairs took place during several of these masses. Sometimes, the confrontation between the church and Indigenous leaders was explicit in these settings. In addition to the Catholic celebrations, I also engaged in participant observation during several Evangelical religious services. Although important in many respects, these religious activities are smaller and have less impact on the community, since only twelve percent of the total population are members of the three Evangelical churches in the community.

Figure 5.3 Veracruceño youth during the celebration of El Día de la Santa Cruz.

In fact, most leaders of these congregations are from Rivas and come to Veracruz every time there is a service. Important information related to my research was collected in these settings. For example, it was during one of my visits to an Evangelical church that I realized how the leaders of the church were overtly trying to subordinate the social fabric of Indigenous identity by introducing an overarching Christian identity. Some Indigenous members of the church would give it minor importance, but others were concerned about the threat that such ideas pose to the community. I shall later describe how this situation is seen by Veracruceños as part of the overwhelming mestizo culture.

3. Healing Sessions

On several occasions, I was given the opportunity to observe healing sessions in Indigenous healing spaces typically closed to outsiders. During these sessions, I was able to closely follow Indigenous healer/patient interactions and procedures. I learned about Indigenous medical ideas and practices about the illness and healing forces operating in the patient/healer social space. It was in the intimacy of these sessions that healers could tell me about their healing technology, knowledge, and even secrets about witchcraft. I learned about Veracruceño traditional nosology, etiologies, pharmacopoeia, medical amulets, diagnostic methods, and illness categories. Healers and patients alike shared important medical and spiritual information with me in these settings. I was able to look into what kinds of "things" and "forces" (Hahn 1995:27) were present during these sessions, how they were articulated, and how they are embedded in both the discourse and practice of an Indigenous identity. During some of these sessions, I also learned how, according to healers and patients alike, Indigenous medicine is an essential component of their community identity.

Issues of Translation

All of the primary data was collected and documented in Spanish. As a result, I had to transcribe and translate the information into English. A few secondary sources, such as the 1992 book on the First Continental Encounter of Indigenous, Black, Popular and Traditional Medicine in Estelí, Nicaragua, some archival documents, and general literature on Nicaragua were also consulted in Spanish. Some ideas, descriptions, and events were easily translatable, particularly academic texts and instances in which formal

Spanish was used. Others, however, posed a significant challenge to my grasp of both English and Spanish. Overall, it has been an arduous test of my ability to translate not only standard Spanish, but also the local particularities, oral variations, and poetic licenses speakers display in everyday conversations. Translation has been a dialogue between what I observed, what I was told, the context of the specificities of their language and my own interpretive particularities. At the beginning of my fieldwork, I had to translate most of the conversations into conventional or standard Spanish. It was only after a few weeks that I began to feel more linguistically competent around Veracruceños. Despite the fact that I am a native Spanish speaker, at times there were some linguistic differences with which I struggled. In general, people assumed that if I spoke Spanish I should also be able to understand their dialect. Sometimes even simple, common Spanish words were a bit tricky. The word "moral" for example, in Salvadorian dialect, refers to a bag or a purse, but in Veracruz it has a sexual connotation. Many of the conventional Spanish words that mean one thing in my Salvadorian dialect often meant something else in theirs, and vice versa. The names of some fruits and plants were also different. In this respect, awareness of the differences between local and standard meanings of certain words, phrases, and idiomatic expressions demanded additional attention.

Chomsky's (1957) theories of deep structure have been useful in helping me grasp some of the seemingly opaque, confusing meanings. That is to say, regardless of the problems of language competence and performance that surfaced in the way a message was conveyed to me, I understood the meaning underneath the presumably inadequate usage of standard Spanish. Since Veracruceños and I share many linguistic similarities, I could infer their meaning, regardless of the way in which they structured their sentences.

I had to look beyond the particular "surface structures" (Chomsky 1957) some of my interlocutors used in the formation and articulation of their ideas. This enabled me to make intelligible generalizations about what was been communicated. Furthermore, in exceptional cases, I had to make contextual inferences, especially when ideas were uttered in their own dialects, in order to present my research in a comprehensible fashion. For example, during one of my first interviews, an informant was to show me how to prepare a special remedy that treats cancer, as that was what we had agreed upon prior to the interview. Given my cultural consultants' particular usage of Spanish, he literally taught me "how to prepare a cancer". However, it was clear that what he meant to convey was how to prepare "the medicine" to treat cancer, rather than the disease itself. Only towards the end of our conversation did he actually make clear statements about it, by unequivocally telling me how to prepare the remedy to treat cancer. This example illustrates some of the most problematic aspects of accurate translation I faced while writing this dissertation. Making a consistent effort to learn the local linguistic particularities, while adapting my speech and comprehension accordingly, helped me in this process. However, I must also acknowledge that in many instances some of my interlocutors spoke with extraordinary eloquence and elegance that made translation a simpler task.

Following an idea originally proposed by Jakobson (1959), I translated not only words, but also concepts and contexts. A small amount of editing has taken place only to make translations readable. However, in an effort to maintain the "stylistic impact" (Jakobson, 1959) of the original discourses, I have made every attempt not to lose the linguistic distinctiveness of the speakers through the translation process, i.e. their own sense of grammatical order, signification and unity of the topic. In this sense, translation has not been simply a question of linguistics, but also one of cultural interpretation. Following Guarddon's (2003) argument about the problem of assuming equivalence in translation, I became aware of the fact that my interlocutors' messages did not always have an equivalent English counterpart, in reference to words, message, or grammatical structure. Therefore, in order to come up with a more reliable translation, I have employed Bernárdez's (1995) theory of "self-regulation of communication". According to his theory, the translator adjusts the information according to the necessities of the receiver and other contextual factors in a process of self-regulation that has a tendency towards a state of entropy or a state of equilibrium. Equilibrium, according to Bernández's theory, should be understood as the ideal result where the message has maximum comprehension with minimum alteration of the linguistic elements and structures. Taking into account some of these issues, I believe that incorporating the cultural context, which I understood and appreciated through my own participant observation, has allowed me produce an accurate translation of the data collected. With the aim of diminishing errors, I consulted my interlocutors about ambiguous utterances in order to verify my translations. This enabled me to corroborate my original inferences and extrapolations as well as adjust for miscomprehension.

Issues of Validation

On what grounds is this research valid? What kind of validation have I employed to make the distinct claims I make in this ethnography? These are some of the questions that most ethnographers face when confronted with the difficult task of studying people, society and culture, or more precisely, human beings. The relationship between ethnographer and the people being studied creates an inevitable dialectic problem that we can begin to solve by acknowledging and addressing such tensions. Data collection, interpretation, and recording are never pure hermeneutic processes. As ethnographers, we are not dealing with a lifeless text. On the contrary, we are interpreting a living, thinking and feeling text, namely a community of human beings. If culture is a "text", as claim by Geertz (1973), then it is one in constant production. Thus, to make valid claims, we must seek a common ground of understanding or at least some sort of general correspondence between our interpretations the people's perceived reality. In their hermeneutic method, Michrina and Richards (1996) argue that researchers' descriptions must correspond to the group's understanding in order to validate their knowledge. Although not always identical, interpretations must at least be based on some collaboration between the ethnographer the people being studied (Young and Goulet 1994).

Aware of the fact that returning to Nicaragua before writing this dissertation was going to be difficult, I had bimonthly meetings with key cultural consultants and members of la Directiva and the Monéxico to discuss, clarify, and confirm or challenge my interpretations. Each time, I would make a summary of my ideas and asked for feedback. Most of the time, we had open discussions about crucial and controversial issues. The idea was to create a general understanding between my interpretations and the Veracruceños' perceived reality. However, when confronted with interpretative discrepancies, I explained to them that I would make it clear in the text that such interpretations are my own and that they differ from how the community's views the matter. These discrepancies are more evident in my own descriptions of actual, as opposed to ideal, behaviour. However, even then, we came to a collaborative understanding to separate my interpretations from theirs. This seems to be a classical *emic* and *etic* dilemma of a contested reality (Harris 1979), which, nevertheless, is closer to the representative truth of a given culture than false objectivity can ever be.

Although the notion of "true objectivity" has long been proven to be an illusion, (Ellis 1990; Haraway 1991; Lakoff 1987; McGinn 1983; Poole 1972; Traweek 1988), the idea continues to be, for positivistic science, an important tool in striving to improve quantification and descriptive accuracy. In theory, it guarantees acceptable standards in the production of the theories of scientific knowledge. To some, objectivity is also motivated by a genuine concern for fairness and impartiality in circumstances where it can be achieved in a relatively reasonable manner (Lakoff and Johnson 1980:226). For example, Martin's (1987) exploration of western science and medicine shows how scientists and physicians do not merely describe nature "as it is". Rather, she argues that the way they see and interpret bodily processes is determined by cultural beliefs about gender, persons, bodies, production, power and authority. Paradoxically, because anthropologists are also scientists of a sort, it is the aspired neutrality found in an objective view that motivates us to see all cultures, including the culture of science, as precisely that: a cultural manifestation of human agency. In the process, it seems as if we watch ourselves watching ourselves in an infinite, subjective gaze of objective observation, which we attain only by illusively abandoning the boundaries of our own cultural conventions (Ellis 1990; Haraway 1991; Lakoff 1987; McGinn 1983; Rosaldo 1980; Poole 1972; Traweek 1988). Wagner (1995:56) wrote that "an anthropology which never leaves the boundaries of its own conventions, which disdains to invest its imagination in a world of experience, must always remain more an ideology than a science". Although this idea is indispensable for a rigorous scientific inquiry, its true meaning is thereby more poetic than academic; nevertheless, a common ground of understanding is to be established. Scientific facts are factual because they are measurable, conceivable, understandable, demonstrable, empirical, and replicable within a scientific culture. Outside the boundaries of meaning created by science, the idea of an objective reality is relatively meaningless. To try to see the world with a fallaciously objective eye is to miss-out the (gloriously) subjective worlds that daily constitute human social life. Wagner (1995:52) wrote that "perhaps one of the greatest achievements of anthropology has been the invention of the concept culture, for only then have they been able to study other cultures."And their findings", he continues, "Have made it impossible for any literate person to believe that there is only one-way of seeing the world". On this belief rests my interpretation of the history, struggle, and life of Veracruceños.

Along with Crapanzano (1992), Clifford and Marcus (1986) and Marcus and Fisher (1986), I too argue that it is impossible to ascertain exactly what the people we study are thinking and feeling when we observe or interview them. Thus, given the inescapable subjective nature of "the culture" with which I study their culture, I can only make qualitative interpretations about the life and history of Veracruceños. Simply put, the validity of my interpretations lies in the fact that this ethnography is the result of the collaborative work between my academic interests and the willingness of Veracruceños to tell me their stories. Throughout this research procedure, I have, within the paradigms and parameters established in anthropology, collected, classified, organized, analyzed, and interpreted the data that constitute this ethnography, not as a fixed sample of knowledge, but as an ongoing process of understanding while acknowledging the tensions that exist between the researcher and the people being studied.

Conclusion

I have referred to this section as Research Procedure rather than Research Methodology or Research Methods, as it is typically referred to in dissertations, for the following reasons: Piantanida and Garman (1999) have suggested that as a matter of methodological principle, we should not use the term "Methodology" to introduce this section of a dissertation because, first, the word methodology literally means the study of methods and is, therefore, a misnomer for descriptions of research procedures. Second, people often equate the term method with technique or a how-to-do-it formula, an equation that, given the profoundly qualitative nature of my anthropological inquiry, is not very useful here (For a more detailed discussion on this subject, see Smith and Heshussius 1986). Furthermore, since it is impossible to design a research procedure in a sterile epistemological vacuum (Smith and Heshussius 1986), as researchers, we must always be fully aware of the kind of preconceptions we may bring into our own inquiry. We must be attentive to the kind of asymmetrical power there may be in the relationship between us, as investigators, and what or whom we investigate. This is of outmost importance because the contingencies determining how we define "the truth" are hardly ever a quantitative problem. Even if they were, ultimately, as put by Joseph (2004:20), "truth is a judgment applied to a representation of reality, not reality itself". In this regard, I have used the terms method and methodology in this chapter only as they relate to the general procedural nature of the inquiry, which I conceived to be a novel representation of the Veracruceños reality, in a procedural rather than in a methodologically deterministic manner.

CHAPTER IV

VERACRUCEÑOS' IDENTITY: Definition, Importance and Vulnerability

Chapter Overview

Veracruceños' interest in reinvigorating their Indigenous identity stems from the need to preserve it in the face of the eroding threat posed by an "overwhelming mestizo culture". In this chapter, I present my interpretation of Veracruceños' definitions of identity and their preoccupation with its vulnerability and gradual erosion. Although Veracruceños consider Indigenous identity as "something" that is inherent, historically timeless, and indissoluble, they believe it is vulnerable and contingent upon social pressures. Hence, it needs to be protected, safeguarded, and vitalized through various forms of cultural means. As I demonstrate in this chapter, the metaphors Veracruceños use to refer to their identity are based on the "cultural objectification" (Handler 1988) of the essence that, according to them, defines the nature of their identity.

I begin with a general historical discussion of the mestizo people in order to put the nature of the threat that the mestizo culture represents for Veracruceños into contemporary perspective. I also address the ways in which Veracruceños understand the nature, importance, and meaning of their Indigenous identity as they relate those aspects to their own ideas of self-representation and boundary maintenance. I provide ethnographic evidence through the testimonies of several community leaders and other Indigenous people. These demonstrate their deepest concern of losing their Indigenous identity to the ever-increasing threat of the mestizo culture. According to their views, the main antagonists to their Indigenous identity are: government hypocrisy, the school system, the Catholic and Protestant churches, political parties, exogamous marriages, and modern life. In addition, I briefly address the history of the mestizo culture as a way of framing its contemporary condition and the impact it has on the lives of Indigenous peoples, particularly for the Veracruceños. I conclude with a discussion on primordial attachments and their role in ethnic identity formation, by addressing how Veracruceños use biological and cultural primordial attachments to affirm their identity.

Mestizos in Historical Perspective

Pérez-Torres (2002:164) suggests that from a historical perspective, *mestizaje* in Latin America represents the tracing of a material and cultural process based on a violent ethnic, colonial encounter. From its incipiency, the Spanish clergy and Crown rejected mestizaje as undesirable as much as the Indigenous communities did. Dueñas (2000:39) suggests that, in general, mestizaje was regarded as evidence of the Conquistadors' seduction and rape of Indigenous women. However, Fabregot (1988) and Johnson[16] (2005, personal communication) argue that seduction and rape were not the only origins of mestizaje. They suggest that there were in fact many instances, in which Indigenous women willingly took Spanish partners. This suggestion changes the image of the Indigenous women from that of victims to autonomous beings. It is conceivable that this was the case in some instances. However, that should not take away the general violent character on which mestizaje was founded. As suggested by Young-Leslie (2005 personal communication), one must question the circumstances under which these choices were made difficult, stressful, traumatic conditions, such as the ones I have already demonstrated occurred during colonization. Let us bear in mind that being able to access the benefits of Spanish-dominated society meant a better life for a woman and her children. It is then also possible that these free choices were made on the basis of wanting to escape from the exploitation and persecution of Indigenous life. As culturally conservative leader Pedro Gonzáles say in the next chapter: "p*eople don't want to be seen as lesser beings*".

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[16] Dr. David Johnson is a professor of History and Classics at the University of Alberta (2005).

In an effort to wash away the quality of "bastard children" through the paternal recognition, Spanish parents integrated some of the first generations of mestizos into their households. In their new homes, mestizos were socially and culturally isolated from their maternal side and socialized into the Hispanic culture. The socialization was so successful that the first generation of mestizos played an important and strategic role in the last phase of the conquest. In Chile, for example, mestizos actively fought against the Araucanos, and in Argentina they founded the city of Buenos Aires (Mörner 1969:38). Some other members of the first generation also inherited the wealth, prestige, and power of their Spanish fathers.

Undoubtedly, although some mestizos were the products of casual sexual relations during the conquest, there were also instances in which mestizos were the product of legitimately consummated marriages. In some cases, mixed unions received the consecration of the Church. When such unions were strategic to facilitate communication with, and the conversion of the Indigenous population, religious legitimization was carried out (Dueñas 2000:46). These unions were also used to avoid scandalous concubinage. To a lesser degree, depending on the region, in the first years of the XVI century, black people who were brought from Spain as servants also took part in the mestizaje process (Mörner 1969:39). Groups based on Morton's (1839) *Crania Americana* classification of Mongolic, Caucasian, and Black were regarded as constituting the main protagonists of an impetuously thriving *miscegenation*. As mestizo families proliferated, the mestizo population came to be seen as out control and became a social and cultural problem for the colonial administrators. Save the first generations, during much of the colonial period in Latin America, the nobility and the Church considered mestizos an anomaly. In fact, the black and mestizo population occupied the lowest position within the context of the colonial, social mosaic. Furthermore, unlike black slaves and native peoples, mestizos had no conceptual legitimate space within the juridical, territorial, social, and historical order (Dueñas 2000:39). Nevertheless, in spite of much opposition and prejudice, the mestizaje in Latin America grew to become a gigantic and irreversible social, cultural, and biological reality. Nowhere else has there been such a massive *mestizajenization* as the one that has been taking place in Latin America (Mörner 1969:15).

Around the end of the eighteenth century, mestizaje was so well advanced in most of Latin America, that very few people could be said to be of a "pure race" [sic] anymore (Borah1954:314). "Pure race" in this context refers to visible physical characteristics or attributes, i.e., skin and eye colour and type, colour of hair, and other bodily appearances. The gradual process of the "Hispanization" of mestizos, and their incremental penetration into the economic sphere helped them move upward in the social and cultural colonial structures. This upward mobility of mestizos greatly preoccupied the ruling colonial elites, creating political anxiety and "racial" fear. Historically, colonial powers had always tried to hinder the raising of mestizos because it literally meant the end of the Spanish peninsular ruling (Dueñas 2000:48). Nevertheless, mestizos eventually outnumbered both American and peninsular Spanish. In time, mestizos became the new rulers of the emerging nations, and mestizaje a powerful symbol of nationalism and ethnic pride.[17] At one point, the process of mestizaje was not only a "racial" issue; it became a social issue. Being a mestizo became both an ascribed and an achieved status (Knight 1990:73). Even though it may take some decades, people could leave their *Indianness* and claim their *mestizoness.* By dint of education, migration, and occupational shifts, and general acculturation, as well as individual agency, Indigenous people could become mestizo (Knight 1990).

Whisnant (1995:13) suggests that politics of culture in Nicaragua following independence from Spain owe some of their most stubborn structural features and their evolving character to developments that took place during the colonial period. One of them is the concept of mestizaje and the emergence of the idea of "race", which linked to the class system, became a self-perpetuating social reality. In contemporary Nicaragua, as it is the case in most Latin-American countries, the mestizo culture predominates and constitutes the national culture. In general, the mestizo population regards Nicaraguan Indigenous peoples as politically inconvenient cultural minorities, whose definite absorption into the mainstream Nicaraguan society is long overdue. A long-standing image of Indigenous culture as dead, or at least dying, explains and supports this belief. This idea has been part of white [and mestizo] thought about Indigenous people for centuries (Dunk 2003:112). In fact, to my surprise, a few scholars in Nicaragua during interviews would refer to Veracruceños as "Indigenous in transition", which is a euphemism for Indigenous people who are no longer Indigenous people. Despite general mestizo prejudice and discrimination against Indigenous people in Nicaragua, and their presumed ethnic death, Veracruceños define themselves in alterity to the dominant mestizo culture, which represents the greatest threat to their survival as a culture and as a people.

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[17] For a more detailed discussion, see Guiomar Dueñas (2000) *El Mestizaje en la Transición de Colonia a República* (Mestizaje in the Transition from Colony to Republic).

What do Veracruceños Mean by Indigenous Identity?

> Ethnicity is a primal condition... into which one is born... a form of essentialism, in the sense that it involves an ongoing, relatively unchanging group identity (Lewellen 2002:108).

During the fifteen months I spent in Veracruz talking, asking questions, listening to people, going to events, and observing the course of everyday life, I realized how important issues of Indigenous identity are for the community. Assertively claiming an Indigenous identity is such a serious business that it has lately become a major preoccupation for almost everyone. Veracruceños frequently speak about, and make reference to, their *identidad Indígena* or Indigenous identity. When I asked them what they meant by *identidad Indígena*, most Veracruceños referred to it in simple essentialist terms. Their identity is defined as an "ineffable and invisible" essence, which is manifested in their biology, culture, and social organization. As this chapter unfolds, some of these essentialist ideas will become more evident. In the meantime, I present the following quote because I think it best summarizes the common assumption shared by Veracruceños about their Indigenous identity.

> *Our* [Indigenous] *identity is what and who we are. For example, here in Veracruz, we are Indigenous people simply because we were born Indigenous people, in the same way that our grandparent's parents were born Indigenous people, and their grandparents were born Indigenous people, and so on …lo Indígena lo traemos en la sangre. That [essence] which is Indigenous, our Indigenous identity, is in our blood* (ccl. Alfredo López.)

It is clear that Veracruceños, like most human populations (Bonacich 1980; Gil-White 1999; Lemarchand 1986; Eller and Coughlan 1993; Thompson 1989), regard their ethnic identity as inherent, as a primordial essence, which binds them together as members of a single group. As it will be evident in the following pages, Veracruceños understand their ethnic identity as deeply inscribed, long-term group cohesion, based on shared claims to blood, land, a mythologized history, and a language, of which only loose words and few concepts remain in use today (Historian Marenco 2002, personal communication[18]).

Language and Identity

Many Veracruceños feel that out of their original Indigenous culture only a few cultural traits survive more or less intact today. European language and religion assimilated Veracruceños culture leaving little room for ancestral Indigenous one. In fact, among Veracruceños, one can only find few vestiges of their ancestral language and religion (Marenco 2002, personal communication). Therefore, based on its historical importance, it is not surprising to see still vibrant cultural practices such as Indigenous medicine at the core of an effective way to articulate group identity

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[18] Dr. Jaime Marenco is a pharmacist and a local historian who has written three books about Indigenous Rivas.

A small number of Nahua words such as *monéxico* (governing council), and *nacatama*l,[19] among several hundreds of others (including place names), play an important symbolic role in providing a linguistic component to the Veracruceño identity (see Jaime Marenco 2002 for a list of words of Nahua origin used in contemporary Rivas). A similar case has been documented by Edwards (1985). For example, he demonstrated that, despite ineffective efforts to revive the Irish Gaelic language, Irish national identity remains strong and vibrant, since the symbolic role played by the common maintenance of a small number of words appears to be sufficient to satisfy the need for a linguistic component to national identity. Comparable to Veracruz, some of the surviving Irish Gaelic words are the ones used to designate governmental and other national or ethically significant institutions.

Yon (2002:2) suggests that "the passion for identity takes shape as assumptions about sameness or differences between selves and communities are brought into question and people begin to reflect upon who they are or worry about what they are becoming". In order to understand Veracruceño ethnic identity, we must look at how individuals within the community assert those identities and the kinds of symbols they use to represent it as grounded on their biology, history, and territory. According to Tajfel (1978), social identity is that part of an individual's self-concept, which derives from his or her knowledge of his or her membership of a social group together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership.

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[19] Food made of corn meal with potatoes and lard mixed with green peppers, onions, raisins, rice, garlic and pork.

The Veracruceños' Preoccupation with their Indigenous Identity

Throughout my entire research, many people, but in particular culturally conservative leaders, insisted that their Indigenous identity had never been as threatened as it is in these days of rapid local and global change. Arturón Morales., a sixty-year-old member of the culturally conservative group, nostalgically relates how maintaining their Indigenous identity was not such an issue in the past.

> *Many years ago, we lived by ourselves in the villages. No one and nothing messed with us [ethnically]. It was just us Indigenous people. Everybody would get married here. No outsider would come to live here ... Now you see many people in the community who are not Indigenous people married to Indigenous. That's why some kids say they are not Indigenous kids anymore. Life was more peaceful then. There were not too many radios and there was no television at all. Our youth was respectful and proud of being Indigenous people. Now many of our youth deny their Indigenous identity, and think they are mestizos, and imitate what they see in television... It is in this way that we are losing our identity* (ccl. Arturón Morales).

In effect, the relative isolation in which they had traditionally lived served as a protective cultural barrier. Nowadays, however, the cultural boundaries that in the past neatly demarcated group identity based on biological descent or kinship are slowly crumbling or becoming increasingly indistinguishable and blurred. New and better roads, government-run schools, a health post, the entrenchment of a permanent Catholic friar in the village, an increase in the number of television and radio sets in the community, and general migration have altered their culture in ways, which Veracruceños considered irreversible. Chiefly, these changes have altered the structures of family groups, kinship ties, and people's ideas about group identity. Veracruceños feel that most of these changes started to take place in the early 1970s and continued throughout the new millennium[20].

> *Non-Indigenous marrying with Indigenous people are causing the community to lose part of its identity. This is especially true in the comarca of Rio Grande, where many of our Indigenous daughters are marrying out of the community and bringing their husbands into the village. Furthermore, in the last twenty years, many of our [male] youth have migrated to Costa Rica, where they have married non-Indigenous partners. Their children don't feel as Indigenous any more. Their parents don't teach them our way of life, our culture. This kind of attitude weakens kinship ties and in this way, part of our identity is* lost (ccl. Alex Morales.).

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[20] Between the 1970's and the 1990s, Veracruceños, as the rest of Nicaraguans, under went a series of political, economic and cultural changes, imposed by the Somoza, Sandanista, and Chamorro regimes, and the contra war.

Blood ties through marriage are essential in determining ethnogenesis, ethnic dissolution, or ethnic absorption (Horowitz 1985). Given this perceived threat, culturally conservative leaders are adopting a more assertive discourse on the value of their Indigenous identity. For example, Pedro González. in a speech he delivered at the central plaza during one of the annual festivities in May 2002 said the following:

> *If we want to continue to exist as an Indigenous people, we have to protect our identity. The process of mestizo acculturation has caused a lot of damage to our identity. It has caused a lot of cultural erosion to our identity. We need to build a strong cultural barrier to protect it by not abandoning what we do because that's what and who we really are.*

Although Veracruceños seem to agree on what constitutes the value and the quality of their Indigenous identity, *tener una identidad Indígena* (literally holding an Indigenous identity) signifies different things to different people. For example, for some Veracruceños, Indigenous identity also translates into having particular rights over land.

> *Having an identity gives us special rights to our territory, to our particular way of life and to an ancestral history. Above all, it amounts to having the source of selfhood we find the shared experience of being who we claim to be* (Esban Gonzáles.).

> *Our Indigenous identity here in Nicaragua is important because it affords us the luxury of having land and to live in it without having to pay taxes to the*

> *government. Because of our Indigenous identity, at least in some sense, they* [government and mestizos] *respect our land and culture* (Gilberto L.)

Some others believe that having an Indigenous identity involves sharing a set of values that distinguish them from the rest of the Nicaraguan society. These people stress that Indigenous values help them maintain group unity in spite of individual differences and internal conflict.

> *Our identity is important in order to keep our culture separated from the mestizo, and so that they respect our culture* (female ccl. Conchita Gonzáles.)

Many others claim that holding a strong Indigenous identity permits them to keep their Indigenous territory and their distinct values secured.

> *We must strive to preserve our territory by preserving the fundamental elements of our Indigenous identity. Let us not lose such important values as human solidarity and our ancestral ability to harmoniously solve conflict. That's what our identity is all about. In disunity, we will not be able to claim our rights, protect our land and keep our culture. It will be more difficult to call ourselves Indigenous people* (ccl. Conchita Gonzáles).

However, Veracruceños' interest in their land does not seem to stem only from the material value it may have for some. They value and respect their land because they regard it as the mother and sustainer of their existence.

> *Our Indigenous territory is, and has been for time in memorial, the base of our material and spiritual existence. In fact, we refer to land in general as our motherland, not in the patriotic sense, but in an infinite maternal and nurturing way. We are part of the land. Therefore, we value the land simply because we value ourselves* (ccl. Alfredo López.).

The following table shows the results from a survey I carried out on the question: Are you an Indigenous person?

Answer	Number of people
Yes, I am	544
No, I am not	47
I don't know	25
Not answer	20
Total	636

Table 1.4 Who is and who is not an Indigenous person.

Land and Group Identity

The link between people, land, history, and group identity is a powerful one in Veracruz. Land is a symbol of ethnic identity for Veracruceños, but withholding it has also been a chronic and severe source of anxiety. The historic purchasing of their current territory as discussed in chapter II, and the subsequent struggles to retain it reveal these tensions and the symbolic importance of territoriality for Veracruceños. In addition to its pragmatic utility, land tenure for Veracruceños is a means for the preservation of Indigenous cultural identity. This link is by no means unique to Veracruceños. The same relationship between territorial integrity and ethnic identity has been extensively researched elsewhere. For example, White (2000) in his study of nationalism and territory found that territoriality plays an essential role in the construction of group identity. According to Saltman (2002) human behaviour is affected by the multiple ways in which people identify with land, topography and natural resources. Saltman found a growing trend towards defining physical space in specific ethnic contexts. It many respects, Veracruceños' preoccupation with their ethnic identity is also grounded on historical attachments to their land. Beyond its irreplaceable role in sustaining life, in a symbolic way, Veracruceño land is a tangible representation of the continuation of their community, which many Veracruceños regard as a source of ethnic legitimacy in the present.

Nicaraguan's Double Morality on Indigenous "Things"

Like many other Indigenous groups in Nicaragua, Veracruceños feel indignant about the double morality with which the government and the general mestizo society regard them as Indigenous people. The historic and systematic reluctance of the successive Nicaraguan governments to fully recognize Indigenous rights abruptly contrast with the benevolent national discourse about Indigenous people and Indigenous "things". Veracruceños are particularly sensitive to the hypocritical stance taken by both the government and the general mestizo society.

> *On the one hand, the government boastfully promulgates the value of the Nicaraguan Indigenous heritage, but on the other, it hypocritically ignores us by disregarding our claims and cultural preferences* (cc. Antolín Pavón).

This ambivalent relationship with Indigenous "things" and people seems to be an inherent problem in societies that coexist with Indigenous minorities, particularly in the Americas. For instance, Knight (1990:101) notes, "Indigenous people in Mexico are discriminated against for being "Indians", but at the same time admired for being the 'real soul' of country". During the time I spent Nicaragua carrying out this research, I found that Indigenous people there also live under the same national double morality. Their Indigeneity is both disdainfully regarded by the state and mestizo culture, but also ambivalently glorified in the national literature, music, dance, and art. Ironically, Nicaraguan remnants of colonial Indigenous culture are romantically showcased as "*la flor y nata de la cultura Nicaragüense*" (the essence of the Nicaragua culture). This suggests that Indigeneity is valued for its symbolic capital, but not as human capital.

Across the country the *Instituto Nicaragüense de Turismo* or INTUR (Nicaraguan Institute of Tourism), in conjunction with a Nicaraguan brewing company, promote spectacular Indigenously oriented variety shows. During these presentations, the colourful dresses, dances, and the historically romanticized idiosyncrasy of the Indigenous culture literally take centre stage. Besides patronizing one of the sponsoring brand name beers, these well-organized performing productions proudly display a vibrant, celebrated Nicaraguan Indigeneity. In this and many other ways, the state cleverly exploits the touristic value it has found in a historically romanticized Indigenous Nicaragua, while systematically ignoring the most elemental rights of the people whose images and culture they benefit from. Both mestizos and the state ritually appropriate the Indigeneity they often disdain if those elements they borrow will benefit them materially or symbolically.

Cultural appropriation is typically regarded in anthropology as the *theft* of rituals, aesthetic standards and behavior from one culture by another, generally by a non-Indigenous culture from Indigenous culture — often this also involves the conversion of religion and spirituality into "meaningless" pop-culture. Shand (2002) claims that a*ppropriation,* as a mode of cultural engagement, is dependent on an ability to separate a given object, design (idea, ritual, behaviour) from its cultural milieu for the purposes of its employment in a different one. St John (1997), on the other hand, presents a more reconciliatory perspective in his study of the ConFest (Conference/Festival), an alternative lifestyle festival hosted by the Down to Earth Co-operative Society (DTE) in Melbourne, Australia. He claims that there are complex political and personal dimensions of cultural borrowing - especially in regard to the appropriation of Indigeneity. St John discusses numerous performances and narratives, which invoke, appeal to or solicit Indigeneity/Aboriginality as a way of authentication. St John concludes that cultural appropriation is a complex process the investigation of which should avoid selective and reductive discursive analysis. He supports this position by referring to the reconciliatory and alliance forming consequences of cultural borrowing and to the indelibly human process of mimesis wherein identities may be (re)fashioned via identification with multiple nodes of difference.

The same sense of cultural legitimatization is consciously sought in Nicaragua through cultural appropriation. A Nicaraguan mestizo who claims to be sympathetic to the Indigenous cause told me that:

> *Traditionally, most governments here have used the image of the Indigenous people if that benefits their own governmental image, inside and outside the country* (Angel Cajina.).

Former community president, Alex Morales[21], told me that the only organization that looks after Indigenous people in Nicaragua is not a government agency.

> *We have an organization called Movimiento Indígena de Nicaragua (Nicaraguan Indigenous Movement). Its main mandate is to look after the Indigenous people of the Pacific, centre and north of the country. Several leaders from different Indigenous communities from across the country head this organization. And you know, this entity is the only institution that works in the defense of the Indigenous people of Nicaragua...in defense of our rights... because the Nicaraguan government has always denied us our most elemental rights* (ccl. Alex Morales.).

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[21] His period as community president ended in 2001.

> *Government reluctance to recognize our rights legitimately and the overwhelming mestizo culture tacitly permeates our way of life, pose the greatest threats to the survival of our identity, and consequently our culture. We need an equally powerful strategy to survive* (ccl. Pedro Gonzales.).

A prominent Nicaraguan historian told me during one of our many conversations "Veracruz was the capital city of human indolence". He thinks Veracruceños are "catastrophically lazy people, apathetic to progress and fascinated with stagnation." Yet during many of his public appearances, he proudly speaks of the Indigenous roots of the Nicaraguan culture. However, at the same time he equally values the Indigenous and Spanish components of his mestizo culture. The mestizo ambivalence toward the Indigenous world seems to be deeply rooted its colonial origins. Silva (2004, personal communication) argues that "mestizos in Nicaragua deny their Indigenous roots by associating their mestizo condition to being more Spanish than Indigenous."

Dunk (2003:112) has shown how among working men in a northern Ontario town in Canada, the ambiguity toward Indigenous people is represented in the discourse of the local. First, Indigenous people are conceived as representing the classical 'noble savage'. Ideas of an "honest to a fault, hard working, physically tough, able to compete successfully with nature on its own terms, intelligent, and skilled in practical matters" are juxtaposed with negative stereotypes. Some of the most salient stereotypes go from the degenerate, uncivilized Indian [sic] who has no morality, to how Indigenous people are the embodiment of a vast repertoire of locally conceived pathological behaviours. In this sense, as put by Dunk (2003:103), "the Indian [sic] is both the object of derision and the object of envy for the local white".

Among the *Huitoto* people in Colombia, Taussig (1987:324) also reports a similar kind of ambivalence in a white colonist who, despite his disparagement of things of Indigenous origin, employs Indigenous techniques of curing evil spirits. As I demonstrate in chapter IV, non-Indigenous people have opportunistically appropriated Indigenous medicine in Nicaragua.

There are probably hundreds of similar ethnographic examples from all over the world. For the purpose of the study, however, I would like to focus on the Nicaraguan case, as it is a country where being an Indigenous person is widely devalued. Yet Indigenous things are ambiguously admired and strategically utilized. It may seem that the rhetoric of admiration one finds in the national Nicaraguan culture is dedicated to the Indigenous people who existed a long time ago, or at least a fanciful imagining of them, and not to the Indigenous societies of today. The enchantment and fascination with Indigenous things seems to lie in the historical distance that separates contemporary mestizo culture with its own Indigenous past, a past that is always easier to exalt given its relative nonexistence. While fully understanding the double morality expressed in the ambiguity with which we symbolically allocate important meaning to "things," we devalue, and devalue things that are meaningful and important to us; however, this issue is unfortunately beyond the scope of this study. At this point, I can only suggest that Nicaraguan double morality truly stems from the intricate nature of mestizaje itself. As it has been pointed out by Pérez-Torres (2002:164), "Mestizaje derived from a complex history involving both a sense of disposition and empowerment, a simultaneous devaluation and estimation of Indigenous ancestry."

Mestizo Culture Erodes the Indigenous Culture

For Veracruceños, mestizaje weakens Indigenous kinship ties, interrupts the historical continuity of ancestry, and threatens and erodes the ideological and social fabric of their Indigenous culture. The eroding force of the mestizo culture is twice as powerful. On the one hand, it operates without formal systematic pressure from the state through popular culture, but on the other, the state systematically promotes a national culture and identity that are clearly not Indigenous or pluralistic.

The following excerpts are the English translations of some of the testimonies I collected in Veracruz. These exemplify some of the Veracruceños main concerns regarding the overwhelming character of the mestizo culture in relation to the Indigenous identity of Veracruceños. In their own words, several culturally conservative leaders express their deep concerns about the erosion caused by the mestizo culture to the Indigenous identity. They chiefly emphasize how the mestizo culture, through the school and medical systems, general discrimination, and historical prejudice are a major threat to the maintenance of their Indigenous identity. In addition, I include testimonies about the internally produced threats to their identity, such as migration and exogamous marriages. In all of the testimonies, I have faithfully translated the conceptual order in which people spoke to me. What might come across as an irrelevant or improper order of ideas is in fact the way my interlocutors view those ideas and subsequently talked about them. Thus, for the sake of clarity, some minor editing has taken place.

In the first testimony, Pedro Gonzales addresses, from his own perspective, issues of Indigenous identity in relation to how the mestizo culture represents a threat to the preservation of that identity. Presenting this testimony aims at demonstrating, from the perspective of Veracruceños themselves, the seriousness and urgency they see in preserving their Indigenous identity and the need to implement innovative strategies to achieve it. The overwhelming character of the mestizo culture vis-à-vis the Veracruceño is evident in these testimonies. Pedro addresses how the overwhelming mestizo culture *erosiona* or erodes the Veracruceño Indigenous culture through institutions such as the school system and popular assumptions what "truly" constitutes an Indigenous person. Following his testimony, I present a contextual and theoretical discussion of Pedro's concern and views on the matter:

Pedro Gonzales' Testimony

As discussed in the chapter I, Pedro Gonzáles is the most important and influential culturally conservative leader in Veracruz. Pedro has twice been the community's president and has served as president as the Nicaraguan Association of Indigenous people for two years. He has represented Nicaraguan Indigenous people in international forums in at least five countries in the Americas. In the following testimony, Pedro addresses the community's concern with the eroding effect the mestizo culture has on the community's Indigenous identity.

I will explain to you what problems we face concerning our cultural identity. As you probably know, since the arrival-invasion of the Spanish to Nicaragua, we, *Indigenous people, have struggled to survive physically, spiritually, and culturally. I can tell you that this country has historically ignored us,* Indigenous *people of the pacific* [Historically, Atlantic coast Indigenous people have received more attention from the government than those from the Pacific coast]. *However, from 1974 onwards, we've been making progress in terms of recuperating what the mestizo culture had eroded from ours. The process of the revolutionary struggle in the 1970s opened new venues to recuperate our culture. The revolutionary struggle made it possible to, at least, start discussing and putting issues of Indigenous identity and culture into the national agenda. That's a giant step. For example, during that time* [the 1970s] *Indigenous students, who'd formerly hidden their Indigenous identity, were then fighting for their student's rights as Indigenous students. It was difficult for students to do that because at the same time their peers at school in Rivas ridiculed many students from Veracruz for their Indigenous condition. Nevertheless, the revolutionary struggle gave us the momentum needed to make public our claims about our Indigenous conditions, needs and cultural identity. Unfortunately, people's attitudes didn't change.*

At the beginning, many of us supported the revolution. It made sense. It was a matter of fighting against a government whose vision was to let us die alone, abandoned. We expected a lot from the revolution. Unfortunately, even the Sandinistas leaders at one point tried to deny our condition of being Indigenous people. They treated us like regular peasants. In part, it was due to the fact that many of us joined in Sandinista organizations not as Indigenous people but as regular peasants. Many Indigenous leaders would parade their [achieved] Sandinista status and would hide their [ascribed] Indigenous identity. "I am a Sandinista leader", some of them would tell me, when in fact they were

Indigenous leaders who happened to be members of the Sandinista army. [Gil-White has suggested that people cannot lose and acquire ethnic status the way they might other kinds of statuses or 'identities', the politics of ethnicity will be qualitatively different from other kinds of politics (2002:176)]. *However, as Indigenous people became more militant about the Indigenous cause, things started to change and we were able to get different treatment from the government. We organized ourselves and kept on lobbying and opening spaces that were more political both nationally and internationally. Nowadays, as you can see, we have overtly declared our struggle as an Indigenous one. Now we overtly fight for Indigenous rights as Indigenous people, not peasants. I understand that, of course, we are peasants because we live in the countryside. That is not what defines us as a people. That is not our cultural identity.*

People's perceptions are difficult to change, even among our own Indigenous people. For example, some of our leaders are not clear on who, or what, our enemies are. I will tell you a story. Three years ago, a Maya brother came to our community to visit us from Guatemala. During one of the many meetings, our leaders spoke very eloquently and assertively about issues of autonomy and cultural identity of Veracruz. However, one of our leaders told the Maya visitor that the only thing we were thankful the European brought us was their religion. The Mayan leader was of course very disappointed, but didn't say anything. What our leader said was an awful contradiction. Nowadays, through the European church the mestizo culture keeps on penetrating deeply our culture, causing more damage and erosion. This one example is just to show you how there are many things and ideas that have been ingrained in the minds of our people and distorts who we really are.

Even nowadays, there are Indigenous people who do not assume their Indigenous identity. Some don't assume their identity for lack of knowledge. There have been cases in which an individual who is exposed to Indigenous' issues and struggle for the first time, realizes that he too is an Indigenous person. By learning about his origin and ancestors, he discovers that so and so was his grandfather, who was a leader in such year and in such community. If people lose track of their origins, they lose their identity. It is easy to lose track if one does not live in an Indigenous community. Some others consciously deny their identity as a protection from the harsh mestizo prejudice against Indigenous people. Mestizos see us as inferior to them. People don't want to be seen as lesser beings. So just to avoid embarrassment and the painfully lonely feeling of being discriminated against, they simply hide their Indigenous identity. It hasn't been easy to say "I am an Indigenous person". Even now, it isn't easy in a society in which Indigenous people are looked down, isolated, and mistrusted. I tell you, some people are still afraid of publicly admitting their Indigeneity. We believe things would improve if we could implement special programs for our own Indigenous education, in pre-school, primary and secondary schools, as well as in vocational training workshops. We need to build collective self-esteem and promote our culture. Unfortunately, the current school system tries to erode our Indigenous culture. The mestizo effort to erode our culture is such that even in our own community schools, some teachers tell our children that they [the children] are not Indigenous people. For example, just recently during an important and crowded school assembly, the principal told us that we should stop fooling ourselves pretending to be Indigenous people, because there were no longer Indigenous people in the Pacific of Nicaragua. "You are mestizos", she said. We were very upset, to say the *least. We immediately complained, and told her that we claim to be Indigenous people because first, that's what we had been taught and told by our parents, grandparents, and all our ancestors. Second, we live in a legally recognized Indigenous territory; and third, we asked her who she thought she was to de-legitimize our right to an Indigenous identity. I told her that there is an international bill of rights, which recognizes the natural right of people to have to an identity. "In fact", we told her that according to that international right, she could claim to be Spanish, European or Chinese, and whatever she wanted to claim to be, we would respect her identity. Finally, we warned her we would sue her formally if she kept on telling our children in class that they are not Indigenous children. As far as I we can tell, she has stopped publicly denying our Indigenous identity.*

This, of course, doesn't mean that things have changed in the school. Teachers continue to inculcate non-Indigenous values in the minds of our children. From our homes, our children to go school full of communal and collective values and a clearly Indigenous way of thinking. At the school, however, teachers teach our children the contrary. In the end, our children come out of school ready to be part of a capitalist system, not an Indigenous society. They come out selfish and arrogant about their schooling and knowledge and with no willingness to do outreach or voluntary work in the community. The government-run school system does not instruct our children. It deconstructs them by eroding our culture and destroying our identity. They [teachers and other government agents] *don't treat us with respect; they treat us with hypocrisy. The school principal and many civil servants alike are very nice to us when we go to see them in person; but once we turn our backs, they say horrible things about us. This is just one* *of the many reasons why we are struggling to have autonomous control over our own education.*

Another example that makes evident how this country ignores us happened to me during an Indigenous meeting organized in Guatemala by Rigoberta Menchú.[22] *There, I ran into an Indigenous brother from the Atlantic coast [of Nicaragua], who, sadly, told me that he didn't know there were Indigenous people in the Pacific coast. I did not blame him because before the revolution, most people in Nicaragua thought that the only Indigenous people in this country were the societies of the Atlantic and center of Nicaragua. As I already told you, people in this country, historically and largely, have ignored Indigenous communities in the Pacific. It is sad, because from the independence wars and onward, Indigenous people in this country have paid a high price in all the struggles, not as Indigenous people, but as anonymous individuals or as wrongly called peasants. That is why we have to build a strong sense of identity. If we want to have a strong sense of our identity, we must start wearing our own hat, not someone else's hat—not a Sandinista hat, not a peasant hat, not a Liberal hat, but our own Indigenous hat.*

[Mestizo] *prejudice against Indigenous people has forced us historically to hide our identity. That is why in many ways, we have been raising someone else's flag. But it was about time we started raising our own, and that's what we are doing now claiming back everything that is ours and that have been appropriated by the mestizo culture. Fighting for an identity is a process that has taken 500 years. We don't know how much more time it may take. It may even never end. In this globalized and acculturated world in which we live nowadays, in one way or another, our culture is being penetrated, and*

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[22] Menchú is a Quiche indigenous leader from Guatemala, who in 1990 won the Noble Peace Prize.

through that penetration, we become desidentizados (identityless), our identity is taken away. Therefore, we must search for ways to survive culturally. The system [mestizo culture] *has been destroying our culture in so many ways. The mestizo society isolates, mistreats and abuses our Indigenous society. In order to survive, many of us had to hide our Indigenous identity. As I told you, many Indigenous brothers still hide their identity. That is one of the most fundamental problems, which we must solve. If you want a simple proof, just go and carry out a little experiment. Go search and try to find out how many Indigenous agriculture cooperatives there are, and you will find out how many of them are Indigenous, but deny that identity it by posing as campesino cooperative members. The system is an octopus, and with its tentacles keeps on acculturating us through fear. They did it in the past and they are doing it now. Let us keep in mind that it was right here in Rivas where the invaders first disembarked, only five kilometers away from here to Rivas and four to the lake. That's where the conquistador Gil Gonzales first arrived. We live only a few kilometers away from the Pacific Ocean. Let us not forget the many thousands of deaths the invasion caused to our people.*

In addition, overt lies and misinformation have contributed to the partial loss of our identity. For example, around twenty years ago most people did not know there was an Indigenous community in Veracruz. Even worse, as I already told you, our Indigenous brothers from the Atlantic coast didn't know there were any Indigenous people in the pacific. Some of the books written about Nicaraguan Indigenous only refer to pockets of Indigenous resistance in Monimbó and Sutiaba because these communities were involved in notorious struggles of Indigenous resistance. However, the truth is that those struggles didn't take place only there. Many other people from Matagalpa, Rivas, and other *departments were also involved in the defense of their Indigenous territory. Now we are defending our identity. In spite of mestizo prejudice, and the engulfing effect their culture is having in ours, we keep on struggling. We believe that one day the mestizo culture will accept our natural right to be whom we claim and reclaim to be. Our identity is still alive and will be in spite of all the cultural aggression we suffer from the dominant mestizo culture. That's what I mean by the erosion of our culture and the cultural aggression of the mestizo society toward our identity. Ignoring us is another way of denying our existence- our rights, our needs, and our identity.*

Discussion

Dorais (1995:294) defines cultural identity as the basic consciousness of one's own group's specificity amongst other peoples, in terms of living habits, customs, language, values, etc. Thus, cultural identity, he argues, is universal, because all people in the world are conscious of some sort of specificity that sets them apart from others. By contrast, citing Simon (1983) and Elbaz (1985), Dorais claims that "ethnic identity only seems to occur within complex societies (i.e. societies with a state apparatus, social classes, etc.), when it appears functional to divide people into categories based upon something other than gender, age or occupation" (1995:294). In this regard, he argues that although ethnicity is linked to cultural identity, because in order to categorize people, one must often refer to some of their cultural, linguistic or religious specificities, ethnic and cultural identities are fundamentally different (1995). While this is an important and useful theoretical differentiation, it may not be the case everywhere. As is evident in

Veracruz, Indigenous identity is synonymous with cultural identity. As an ideological and social practice, cultural identity constitutes a core aspect of how Veracruceños perceive and construct the Indigenous history, which legitimizes their sense of ethnicity. It seems to me that, like any other cultural category, Veracruceños have internalized the concept of ethnicity to a point that "ethnic identity" has acquired the status of a "cultural identity". As exemplified by Pedro Gonzales in the previous testimony, ethnic or cultural identity refers to a social and *natural* distinctiveness that is based on a specific cultural configuration of *a conscious nature*. "History, language and ideas of 'race' are all possible bases for cultural identity and they are all socially constructed realities" (Friedman 1994: 238).

Indigenous identity exists as a set of social relations and actions. In Veracruz, ideas of ethnic identity are in some respect also hegemonic. By socially and historically mapping a collective sense of selves, ethnic identity also determines the ordering of the world, which is realized in everyday conscious understanding of the signs that impart a sense of Indigenous reality and its social, historical meaning (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991). On an unconscious level, however, ideas of cultural identity in Veracruz "come to be taken-for-granted as the natural and received shape of the world and everything that inhabits in it" (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991: 23). In this sense, the social experience of embodying an ethnic identity in Veracruz acquires the status of primordial experience because it is no longer a matter of rational choice, but one of tradition, and of emotion evoked by perceptions of common ancestry and a shared past that historically constitutes their present ethnic identity. This is precisely what Veracruceños means when they say that they are *la continuación histórica* or the historical continuation of the ancient Nahua people. Ironically, despite its primordial quality, ethnic identity in Veracruz is something that must be protected against the eroding power of the mestizo culture.

Arturón Morales' Testimony

In this testimony, Arturon speaks of the importance of realizing or acknowledging one's Indigenous roots in order to claim it and defend it, in the face of extinction. He argues that although one can make political choices about one's identity, one cannot get rid of one's "real" identity at will. The Veracruceños' *essentialist* view of ethnicity seems evident in this testimony, as well as in more than one hundred interviews I carried out during my fieldwork. I present here the one of Arturón because it shows the need Veracruceños have to socially manipulate non-essentialist elements to preserve what they consider essential ones.

Accepting one's own Indigenous condition and identity is really up to the individual. However, whether one accepts it or rejects it, is irrelevant because one can never resign to a condition acquired at birth. One is born who one is. In the department of Rivas, a lot of us are of Indigenous of origin. However, when you ask people about their origins many would typically deny their Indigenous identity. In many respects, Veracruz is different from other Indigenous communities in Rivas. Our ancestors taught us to never deny our Indigenous identity and to be proud of it. In fact, they went as far as legally founding this community around two hundred years ago. Other communities, such as San Jorge, for example, lost their Indigenous status and condition. It is unfortunate, because San Jorge is precisely the place where Cacique Nicaragua lived and died.

Nowadays in San Jorge, where the majority of people are of Indigenous origin, people won't know what to tell you if you ask them about their Indigenous roots. They honestly don't know anything about their Indigenous past and origins. However, if you go to the island [Homotepe[23]] *to Urbayte, you'll find people who fought and still fight to defend their Indigenous identity and culture. Furthermore, in some other communities such as in Popoyuapa, for example, people are trying to legally organize their Indigenous communities. They want to reclaim their Indigeneity and Indigenous status. Some of their leaders have spoken to me about their plans to revive their communities and have asked me for advice. People from Las Salinas and Nancimí, here in the department of Rivas, are also trying to get legal recognition for their Indigenous communities. Interest in rescuing our Indigenous roots is growing in Nicaragua.*

Mistakenly, many people think that to be an Indigenous person means to wear Indigenous clothes. They think that only the Indians [sic] *from Mexico who look like the apaches in Western movies are true Indigenous people. Here, people make fun of our Indigenous condition because "we don't look like Indians"* [sic] *they say. Ultimately, it doesn't matter what they say. What matters is what we believe and what we know we are.*

Discussion

Although Veracruceños seem to be quite aware of the objective, observable features and shared symbols that signal their ethnic identity, they are equally conscious of the value of the *subjective* aspects that also determine its primordial nature. Veracruceños firmly believe in their common ancestry and history from which the "*we-*

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[23] Urbayte is a district in the *municipio* of Altagracia on Omotepe Island in Lake Nicaragua, department of Rivas.

feel" (Smith in Scupin 2003:68) or a profound sense of *oneness* stems. This "we-feel" sentiment is commonly expressed by Veracruceños in the conscious acknowledgement of an inherent distinctiveness between one's own "in-group" versus the other's "out-group" (Summer 1906)[24]. Arturon's disregard for the mestizo's opinions about the authenticity of the Veracruceños Indigenous identity, demonstrates how the subjective aspects of ethnic identification are more important to Veracruceños than presumably objective and observable ethnic aspects attributed by "out-groups". In some respect, the Veracruceño "we-feel" sentiment seems to be closer to an ontologically perceived, rather than socially defined ethnic identity, which given its presumed ontological nature needs no system of external validation for the people involved[25]. It seems that for Veracruceños, the validity or authenticity of an Indigenous identity is self-evident in the existence of individuals that by "essence" are Indigenous people. The Veracruceño concept of the Indigenous identity finds its clearest expression within the belief about a common ancestry and history that exist as a primordial essence, regardless of whether or not individuals acknowledge it. It is a conceptual truth that needs no further proof than the fact that those who believe it and claim it are themselves Indigenous peoples. This idea seems to be consistent with Smith's (1986) argument. According to Smith (1986:68), it does not matter whether these beliefs are true, genuine, scientifically accurate, or even fictional. The subjective identification of individuals with an ideology of a shared history, unique past, and symbolic attachment to a home territory are often the most significant expressions of ethnicity identity (Smith 1986:68).

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[24] William Graham Summer (1906) coined the term **ethnocentrism**, and assigned it an important role in shaping both the relationships between peoples and many of internal dynamics of their societies (in Brown 1976).

[25] Young-Leslie (2005, personal communication), has pointed out that a similar situation has been described by Clifford's (1988) work on identity in Mashpee, Massachusetts.

Alex's Testimony

As was addressed by Pedro Gonzales in his previous testimony, mestizo institutions erode the Veracruceños Indigenous culture. In the following testimony, Alex Morales also addresses how the school system and the church, as mestizo institutions, contribute to this erosion. According to Alex, it erodes their Indigenous identity by creating an anti-discourse about Indigeneity. This anti-discourse overtly tells Veracruceño students and devotees that they are not "real" Indigenous people:

The issue of our Indigenous identity is definitely a problem. Even in our community, we have some people who do not consider themselves to be Nahua people or Indigenous people. However, the contradiction is that those who don't consider themselves Indigenous really look more Indigenous than those of the many of us who claim to be Indigenous people. This contradiction is a real problem, but a problem of ethnic identity for them. I think that, ultimately, this problem is the result of the education system. In our community, the government runs our schools. Many of us don't know that we are Indigenous people because we are told the contrary in the schools. That is why we need to have total autonomy in the education of our children. Unfortunately, we haven't been able to obtain that autonomy. We need a school system with adequate programs for our community's cultural necessities. Some of the worst enemies to our identity are right here in the community. They come every day from Rivas to desenseñar (un-teach) our children. Even the school principal tells our children that *they are not Indigenous people anymore. This kind of teaching has made our children grow up with a new and different vision about themselves. They grow up believing that they are not Indigenous people any more. It is dangerous situation because school principals have educational authority.*

Surprisingly, this year [2001] we have witnessed a little change in the school normal activities. Many students from the High School program came to ask me questions regarding the history and organization of the community. Their homework was to interview the president of the community and some other leaders and ask questions related to the history, culture, and administration of the community. For example, they asked me how many presidents the community has had, and what do we do with the money we collect from local taxes, and what projects have we implemented in the community. Another favorite question was, why does the community commemorate October 11 instead of the12th, and so on and so fourth. [The Last Day of the Indigenous People's Freedom on the 11th of October, as opposed to el Día de la Raza (the day of the race), which is celebrated by mestizos in commemoration of the arrival of Christopher Columbus the 12 of October].

I was really surprised and glad to see that the school had showed some interest in our community and its history. We were surprised because the Ministry of Education has never supported us here in Veracruz. The ministry has always closed its doors on us. In fact, at the ministry office, they always make fun of us when we go to see them to make requests for some school needs. They refer to us in a pejorative way by saying, "look here come the Indians; you people don't exist any more, be gone, you people are crazy", and things like that.

I will tell you something that is even more deplorable. You see, I can understand the principal here in Veracruz saying that we are not Indigenous because she isn't one herself. However, for someone who was born an Indigenous person, and raised as one, to say that we are not Indigenous is truly deplorable. There is another principal in one of our comarcas, who despite being an Indigenous person, does not have an Indigenous vision. She does not recognize the Indigenous ancestral authority. She denies her Indigenous roots and identity because she feels ashamed of her origins. She is ashamed because, like all of us, she grew up in a society that popularly and officially believes that the Indigenous person is a donkey who knows nothing and has no rights. In fact, as a principal of one of our schools she realizes how our community, by virtue of being an Indigenous community has been discriminated by the Ministry of Education. She feels she is a mestizo, like the majority of Nicaraguans[26].

We have tried to develop some programs in our community to exercise some control over the formal education of our children. For example, in 1996 we asked the Movimiento Indígena de Nicaragua to include us, like the community of San Lucas [in central Nicaragua] *had been included, in a project they had for the Recuperation of Indigenous Identity and Culture. In this project, the elders go to school and teach children about their Indigenous culture and heritage. A couple of years ago [1998] we tried to implement a project to teach our children the language [Nahua], unfortunately, due to lack of funding the project didn't go through. However, this year [2001] a group of students from the Instituto de Historia y Antropología* (The Nicaraguan Institute of History and Anthropology) *from the Managua University came to visit our community.*

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[26] During an interview I had with this teacher, she also told me that she felt she was more a mestizo than an indigenous person.

They talked to us about the possibility of developing a project similar to some Nahua schools in Mexico. Apparently, in those schools, Indigenous children are very successfully taught Nahua. This was an excellent idea and we are studying the possibility of implementing it here.[27] *The only problem we have is that in our community no one speaks Nahua anymore. We need to hire some from another community. Furthermore, the proliferation of churches has made the community lose many of its traditions, and hence part of our identity.*

Since around 1995, evangelical churches started to pour into the community. Before that, there was one church, to which no one paid attention. Back then, it [the church] *wasn't a problem. Now there are four different evangelical churches. Before their arrival, we used to have innumerable traditions and special foods. They have now changed the traditional diets of our people. For example, they don't eat pork anymore because it is presumably an impure animal. Many of the traditional dishes, which we used to prepare with pork meat and blood, for example, are no longer prepared or eaten in some households. Members of these cults don't eat any pork any longer because of the impurity. "It is a sin to eat that food," they say. We noticed things started to change last year, when we asked the community, in writing, to bring some food for the commemoration of the Last Day of the Indigenous People's Freedom on the 11th of October. We asked the community to help us in the commemoration by bringing traditional foods, which is also an expression of our identity. However, people didn't*

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[27] Regretfully, this Nahua language program has not been started.

bring any meat, especially not pork. They brought other kinds of food, only carbohydrates made mainly with corn. We noticed the change immediately. Also, there were fewer people participating unlike in previous years. We are concerned because the churches are hindering the process of recuperating our identity. We need to recuperate what we have lost and maintain what we have of our identity. We don't need to keep on losing the little we have left.

Another problem that we have now is that, before the coming of the permanent friar to the village, there was no contradiction with the Catholic Church. All of the celebrations that we had were substituted by Catholic celebrations but without changing the original dates. It was a mixture of the two. However, after the 2000 municipal election in Rivas, the friar revealed his true political colour and tried to divide the village between Liberal and Sandinistas. He told some of us that we are Nicaraguan, Christian peasants, and that we should forget about this Indigenous struggle for Indigenous identity. That generated a new ethnic identity crisis in the community. Yes, the friar was telling people that we are not an Indigenous community. We really resent that. But, I realize that this is nothing new. The Catholic Church has always been trying to convert us not only religiously, but also ethnically.

Discussion

In addition to the main issues and recurring themes - ethnic identity, cultural erosion, and essentialist views of ethnicity- Alex brings in his testimony an important element of historical continuation and cultural change. Alex clearly states that Veracruceños did not lose their identity when they lost their original language. Linguistic and identity change are not the same (Joseph 2004). Veracruceños did not become Spanish or ethnically Nicaraguan by simply speaking Spanish, "any more than the Irish became English when they finally adopted the language of their conquerors (Gil-White 1999:810). Neither did Algerians, who adopted French, or Jews who became German, English, and Russian speakers lost their original ethnic identity by simply acquiring a new and foreign language.

Esban Gonzáles' Testimony

The mestizo counter-discourse that teaches Veracruceño students that they are not Indigenous people any longer, because being Indigenous people is a thing of the past, very often backfires. Teachers that overtly try to discourage Veracruceño children from claiming their Indigenous identity are unintentionally encouraging children to assert that which is being negated by the school system and the general mestizo attitude towards Nicaraguan Indigeneity. This seems to be the case because as it has been noted in the anthropological literature cultural, identities are stimulated by their denial (Amselle 1999). "Denied existence; obstinate persistence" (Membreño 1992:1).

When I was younger, I didn't know whether or not I was an Indigenous person. To be honest, throughout my entire childhood and adolescent years, the school system taught me to reject my Indigenous identity. The system taught me directly through courses on history, geography, social studies and other subjects, that one should be ashamed of being an Indigenous person. They [the teachers] *told me that rather than clinging to a long-gone past, we should be thankful for the colonization. They* [the teachers] *implied that thanks to the colonization we* [the Indigenous people] *had achieved the level of development we have. "Thanks to the colonization, you are now better off now", they would say. So, imagine all that indoctrination. However, it was due to my contact with a series of events, which took place in relation to Indigenous claims here in Veracruz that I could gradually become more aware of my Indigenous condition and identity. The struggles for Indigenous rights not only of Veracruz, but also of the whole pacific region in Nicaragua awoke my consciousness. Like me, there are many youth currently finding their way, by realizing their Indigenous identity.*

By watching my people struggle, I started to acquire an Indigenous consciousness. It is so strong and deeply rooted that now everywhere I go, I proudly defend and assert why I am an Indigenous person. Some people even tell me, "But you don't look like an Indigenous man". Being an Indigenous individual is not a somatic or facial expression. It is not the kind of clothes we wear or the type of housing in which we live that makes us Indigenous people. It isn't any of the stereotypes of typical characteristics associated with the image of the Indigenous person what determines our Indigeneity. [The invisibility of cultural stereotypes commonly associated with being "real" Indigenous people, are clearly absent in Veracruz. Veracruceños contest the dominant cultural narratives about identity, by creating their own version about their identity]. *Those who think that are profoundly wrong. We are Indigenous people because the blood that runs through our veins is the same blood of our Indigenous ancestors. We have constantly emphasized throughout our struggle that our Indigenous identity is not based on the visual or physical stereotypes people attribute to being Indigenous people. Albeit, those aspects can be elements to consider, they are not essential determinants. To* *be valid, Indigenous physical markers must be accompanied by a marked consciousness of being and claiming to be an Indigenous person. Your face or your clothes do not determine whether or not you are an Indigenous person; your consciousness does.*

To our Indigeneity, we can add other empirical elements that are equally important, but less visible. For example, we can add aspects of territoriality. We live in an officially and legally bought Indigenous territory. We have been involved in a historical struggle for Indigenous rights. We based our society on a traditional form of social, political, and administrative organization. Another element is the collectivity of our land. There is no private ownership here. Therefore, my point is that these other elements mark and determine our identity and many who judge us don't take them into consideration. Let alone the fact that we are the historical continuation of our Nahua Indigenous ancestors.

The school system tried to make me reject my own Indigenous identity. However, thanks to my dad [a culturally conservative leader] *who has been actively engaged in the Indigenous struggle, I was able to reflect and realize my own historical and cultural reality, my Indigeneity, and my identity.*

Discussion

The process of keeping an Indigenous identity in Veracruz has entailed a *struggling* for that identity. Paradoxically, some Veracruceños claim they acquired their identity precisely *in* the struggle for their identity. This seems to be the case because the struggle provides a space for reflexivity about fundamental concerns with being. The struggle for cultural survival, in its many and varied forms, helps create a consciousness of identity, because by virtue of struggling or defending identity, the individual becomes identified with that for which he or she fights. This is exactly what happened to Esban Gonzales and many other young Veracruceños. Consciousness of ethnic identity or ethnicity for Veracruceños is embedded in social relations, but is guided by a particular ideological view and understanding. This is the result of the need to create as many boundaries as necessary, in order to express collective selfhood vis-à-vis other groups as the organizing principle of cultural differences (Barth 1969; 1995).

> *Here,* [in Veracruz] *we still struggle to rescue, dignify, and conserve our Indigenous identity. By maintaining and exercising our traditional governments such as the Monéxico, our dances, food, and our medicine, we are doing just that... However, many doctors and nurses in Rivas and even here [in Veracruz] when they come, tell us that our medical practices are nonsense and that we should abandon those archaic ideas about spirits and spells. They say those things because they do not understand our way of seeing things and treating illnesses and probably want to sell us their medicine. Many of us in Veracruz think here that promoting our Indigenous medicine is a good way of resisting the total penetration of the mestizo culture and to keep in this way our Indigenous identity strong* (ccl. Alfredo López).

In Veracruz, a struggle for identity by definition implies cultural resistance. For Veracruceños, any form of cultural resistance becomes a strategy for the conservation of its identity through the recreation of identity (Lengel 2005). In Veracruz, that resistance can range from trying to keep a communal organization system in place, such as the monéxico, to promoting a particular way of healing an illness. As I show in the following chapter, an entire medical configuration is used by Veracruceños to recreate their identity as part of the struggle to retain it vibrant and strong.

Conclusion

For Veracruceños, maintaining an Indigenous identity is also a matter of assertiveness and imagination. However, as they have expressed it, it is not an assertion for the sake of being merely antagonistic to the dominant mestizo culture. It is a cultural necessity for the ontological survival of the socially and cognitively meaningful space they call their identity. As pointed out by Joseph (2002:20), "the notion of performative discourse has become a powerful one in recent years, well beyond the 'ethnic' or regional categories to which Bourdieu originally applied it". It is now commonplace to assert that groups identities are claims made through performance. An ethnic identity exist by virtue of the assertions of it people make (Joseph 2002:20).

The sometimes unforced and assertive way in which Veracruceños typically refer to themselves as *Indigenous* people, has given the term an overtly political meaning. Veracruceños use the term in both politically conscious and naturally unconscious fashions. From the term *Indígenas,* the people of Veracruz tailor a particular identity and a meaningful sense of existence as an abstract ontological security, and as a practical group characterization for everyday life. In this sense, the meaning of their identity is both a politically sacred-repository designed to zealously keep primordial attachments and a mundane social label that conceptually set them apart from the mestizo culture. Symbolically, to the "seemingly unconcerned Indigenous person," the term *Indígena* can be just a nominal description of who they are. To culturally conservative militants, on the other hand, as I already stated in the introduction, it is the most emblematic manifestation of their history, territory, kinship, and a destiny, to which they are all bound by virtue of sharing a common identity. Regardless of however lightly or seriously some may take it, they all agree that their Indigenous identity is inherent, historically timeless, and indissoluble.

Although empirically speaking, Veracruceños continuously construct their identity through social performances, they conceive their identity as a fixed essence embedded in a set of primordial attachments given to them at birth and enhanced by their own culture. They strongly emphasize a qualitative fixity in their identity because they conceive it as indelibly written in their biology. As such, it constitutes the essence that has characterized them, traditionally and permanently, as who they are and claim to be. In this sense, predestined by primordial attachments based on blood and cultural affinities, they claim that people in Veracruz are born Indigenous, live Indigenously, and die as Indigenous people. Essentialist Indigenous identities draw their meaning from ancestral and transcendental sources. During an interview with a culturally conservative leader, I asked why some people (only a few of them) in the community told me they were not *Indígenas,* while their siblings claim to be Indigenous people. He stated the following.

> *People who deny their own Indigenous identity do so because they are either arrogant or ignorant. Why? Well, simply because one cannot relinquish one's own blood, one's life, one's own history, one's own kinship, much less one's own destiny. I don't mean destiny in a fatalistic way. You can become an engineer or a medical doctor but you will continue being an Indigenous person because that is your destiny. You were born an Indigenous person. In fact, I have a niece who is a medical doctor in Managua now, and although she never comes here and tries to dissociate from us, she will be an Indigenous person forever, whether she likes it or not* [my interlocutor laughs with an air of triumph]. *I am personally very proud to be an Indigenous person; and I think anybody who is should not hide it or deny it. Rather, they should be very proud of it. The truth is that, in the same way, we cannot pretend to be what we are not; we cannot deny who we really are. One is born what one is. Then, it is up to the individual to deny it, to cultivate it, to defend it, or to ignore it. Here in the community, we have chosen to defend who we are* (ccl. Arturón Morales).

Gil-White (2001:533) has gathered substantial ethnographic data that shows how most ethnies, with very few exceptions, believe that ethnicity can *only* be acquired and transmitted via biological descent. He refers to beliefs as the Primordialist Model of Ethnic Acquisition and Transmission. The above testimonies reveal that Veracruceños posses ethnobiological, and therefore primordialists models concerning the acquisition and transmission of their Indigenous ethnicity. What distinguishes ethnies from other kinds of groups is that ethnic actors conceive membership in terms of categorical descent or biological descent from those possessing a label implying a given cultural 'essence' or 'peoplehood'. Shils (1957) points out ethnies often attribute certain ineffable significance to blood ties. Gil-White (2002:91) makes an empirical case that *essentializing* ethnies in the manner of species is a panhuman proclivity of our psychological design. Nevertheless, in reality, according to Gil-White (2002:190), the ethnic rhetoric of 'kinship' is usually concerned with a founding myth or end-point of common origin myth, not with the tracing of actual genealogies.

Like most ethnies, most Veracruceños too maintain a primordialist understanding and defining their own group ethnicity. Social relations, symbolic associations, cultural signifiers, and group boundary building are only ways of articulating a deeper essence they call *ethnic identity*. Rhetorically, they perceive a deep *essence* ancestrally and indelibly written in their biology. They see their identity as an inherent essence that is both timeless and indissoluble, for it has been transmitted through bloodlines from generation to generation. Ethnicity also implies a common origin, no matter how distant, which in turn implies some sort of "biological relatedness" (Fischer 2003:100). In this sense, it seems that what motivates the behaviour of Veracruceños as ethnic actors is not a calculation of their interests, but rather the history that binds them, as they themselves perceive that history, which is for them essentially or primordial.

Paradoxically, without cultural attachments Veracruceños feel toward their own history, there would be no ethnic identity claims to ancestry, timelessness, and indissolubility. It is the primordial cultural attachments they feel towards their identity that makes them claim deeper connections. Forbes (1990:37) suggests that the source of group identity is based on the individual's primordial attachments or affinities, not only given by blood ties, but by ethnicity, language, religion, and customs. Although people seem to find more legitimacy in biological, rather than in cultural claims, cultural attachments are fundamental because they form the primordial social context into which a child is born and socialized. Gil-White (2002) argues that blood ties do not and cannot take priority over social or cultural binds. Non- biological attachments must be considered primordial because customs are as integral to the child's legacy as biological aspects.

It is a well-established fact in anthropology that "neither supposed 'races' nor ethnies are natural kinds in any biological sense' (Gil-White 2002:41). However, as Gil-White also claims, outside the paradigmatic stipulations that sustain this ontological fact, ethnic actors are profoundly convinced of the existence of a biological essence responsible for ethnicity. Following Barth's (1969) influential theory that an ethnic group must be defined in terms of the actor's own ascription, the conviction about a biological essence is in itself an element of ethnic ascription actors themselves attribute to their group. According to Barth (1969), the objective features, which we might think define the identity of a given group, have little (if any) relevance to the identity we imagine. That is to say, the features that should be taken into account are not the sum of the objective differences, but only those the actors themselves regard as significant. In this sense, what ultimately defines Veracruceños is a set of ideas and practices they regard as significant features of their identity, which conversely they use as signifiers of that identity.

Theoretically, constructivist and essentialist views of ethnicity respectively presuppose either a biological determination (naturalness) or a cultural construction of ethnic identity. However, rather than saying that identity ethnicity is biologically determined or culturally constructed, it makes more sense to say that ethnicity identity is biologically determined to be culturally constructed. Here, by no means am I referring to this idea that "ethnic and biological species categories mobilize the same cognitive resources because ethnies 'look' like species to ordinary human perception and intuitions" (Gil-White:xix). Rather, I prefer a model that addresses the dialectical interdependency of our biological experience and our cultural capacity to make that experience meaningful; hence, biological notions become culturally intelligible. In this respect, the Nahua people of Veracruz del Zapotal culturally maintain an essentialist understanding of their Indigenous identity but at the same time, they socially manipulate any cultural resource that may strengthen the biological essence they have symbolically constructed. It is paradoxical because if it were a biological essence it would need no cultural incentives to survive. Nonetheless, it does because it is through culture that social experience becomes primordially attached to people. Then, we can also talk about that which is culturally primordial, as opposed to its original use as biological matter. The relationship between persons and that, which culturally defines them, becomes inalienable due to the *primordial* quality it acquires through culture.

This primordial ascription, in the case of Veracruceños, is not really a matter of rational choice, but one of tradition and the emotions evoked by perceptions of common ancestry - primordial attachments. It is in this sense that the Veracruceños' notions of ethic membership hold much evidence in support of Gil-White's primordialist Ethnic Transmission and Acquisition theory. As ethnic actors, Veracruceños' instrumental considerations – reacting toward a history of conquest, colonization, land seizure, imposed governance, mestizaje, civil violence, poverty, dispossession, discrimination, and globalization- and by implication their behaviours, are clearly conditioned and constrained by a primordialist foundation. Thus, instead of voicing instrumentalist claims of group identity, they seem to perceive their ethnic identity as a primordial essence indelibly written in their biology, which is, nevertheless, expressed and reaffirmed in cultural and social institutions, i.e. Indigenous medicine.

Following the primordialist tradition, which began with Shils (1957) and Geertz (1963, pp.112–13), and was elaborated afterward by Isaacs (1975), Stack (1986) and Grosby (1994) (in Gil-White 1999:802), it seems to me that as Gil-White (1999:802) has described elsewhere, in Veracruz certain kinds of primordial attachments are felt towards co-ethnics because of "who they are categorically as co-biological descendants from a primary group, and not necessarily as a result of interaction with them". Nonetheless, despite this perceived common ancestry, Veracruceños feel the need to express and reaffirm that primordial ethnic essence through cultural and social means. This is the case because it is through their traditions and their accompanying emotions, including Indigenous medicine, that Veracruceños symbolically reified their biological notion of ethnic identity.

CHAPTER V

LA MEDICINA INDÍGENA

Chapter Overview

This chapter provides a general understanding of *la medicina Indígena* (Indigenous medicine), the Veracruceños' medical system, and how medical experiences, such as illness and healing constitute primordial experiences for Veracruceños. The notion of *primordiality* is of central importance in order to comprehend the social and ideational conditions that permit Veracruceños to use Indigenous medicine as a marker of ethnic identity.

I begin by examining the historical sources that came together to form what today constitutes la medicina Indígena. After that, I address how the primary importance of la medicina Indígena, for Veracruceños, is based on the pragmatic, immediate medical benefits it provides for the community. Healers, local sickness categories, etiological theories, the concept of faith as a healing device, and the concept of medical witchcraft are also discussed in this chapter in order to provide an encompassing understanding of their medical system. Following this section, I present a series of ethnographic testimonies from informants, healers, and ordinary members of the Veracruceño community. My aim is to illustrate how Veracruceños' conscious understanding of their everyday life is intimately linked to ideas about health and illness as they are enacted in social relations, ontological tensions, and medical discourse.

I have selected the testimonies that elucidate, with detail, their ideas, experiences, and events in relation to their understanding and constructions of local medical realities.

These narratives constitute the empirical basis for the relation between Indigenous medicine and ethnic identity in Veracruz, and the ethnographic background for developing the central argument of this dissertation. Using the concept of ***habitus***, proposed by Bourdieu (1998), I conclude this chapter with a theoretical discussion of the social circumstances that make the medical episodes of *illness* and *healing* primordial experiences for Veracruceños. This is of outmost important because the "primordialness" of these medical experiences constitutes the necessary conditions for the utilization of Indigenous medicine as a signifier of ethnic identity in Veracruz. I have based my interpretations of their stories on the premise that, from an anthropological perspective, illnesses are polysemic or multivocal expressions. As pointed out by Good (1976:14), "illness idioms crystallize out of the dynamic dialectic between bodily process and cultural categories, between experience and meaning".

La Medicina Indígena, Origins and Functions

Medical beliefs and practices are a major element in every culture (Foster 1978). They constitute *medical systems,* as being the social mechanisms used by people to seek health and alleviate disease. Thus, "in responding to disease and illness, all human societies create medical systems of one sort or another" (Baer et al. 1997:7). In most pre-industrial societies, medicine is not clearly differentiated from other social and cultural institutions (Baer et al. 2003:8). This is the case for Veracruceños for whom the medical system is an important part of a larger cultural context, which encompasses religious, magical, mythical, political, historical, and judicial ideas. They call their medical system *la medicina Indígena*. In a somewhat broader historical context, one may also say that la medicina Indígena is a synthesized articulation of different medical beliefs and knowledge proceeding from multiple sources. However, it is more accurate a description to say that Veracruceños have been able *to adhere* to their already existing pre-Hispanic herbal wisdom and health practices more than other medical traditions (See Alejandro Dávila Bolaños 1974 Medicina Pre-colombina de Nicaragua). Below I describe eight other historical sources that today constitute la medicina Indígena, which Veracruceños regard as their own vernacular one and as an important marker of their ethnic identity. The following is a list, in alphabetical order, of the eight historical sources I have identified as having, in one way or another, influenced the Veracruceño medical system.

1) African health practices (including witchcraft)
2) B*ioenergetics*[28]
3) Biomedicine or scientific medicine
4) Early Arabic medicine and health practices
5) Greek humoural medicine received from Spanish Renaissance
6) Judeo-Christian religious beliefs, symbols, and rituals
7) Medieval and later European witchcraft
8) Modern beliefs about spiritualism and psychic phenomena

Since thoroughly analyzing the historical elements that constitute la medicina Indígena is beyond the theoretical scope of this study, as the chapter unfolds, I only give examples of how these elements are found or reflected in la medicina Indígena. Each example I provide illustrates, in its appropriate medical context, how these medical ideas and practices have been internalized and incorporated into a single and coherent medical system in Veracruz. With the exception of numbers one and two on the list above, Trotter and Chavaria (1981:25) have delineated the same historical elements as the major sources or influences shaping *curanderismo*. Curanderismo is a widespread traditional medical system found among Spanish speaking people in United States and in many parts of Latin America (Campos Navarro 1997; Cosminsky 1976; Foster 1960; Trotter and Chavaria 1981; Rubel 1984; Scheper-Hughes 1983). Curanderismo and la medicina Indígena share many ideas and practices particularly in terms of the most basic etiological concepts, pharmacopoeia, healing procedures, diagnostic techniques, and some sickness categories. Given these common elements and the use the central figure of el *curandero/ra* (the healer), which I discuss later, it is safe to say that the Veracruceño medical system is analogous to the category of curanderismo.

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[28] Bioenergetics is a diagnostic method developed by a Japanese physician, Yoshiaki Omura, in 1978, and introduced to Nicaragua by the Germans who in the 1980s came as internationalist to work with the Sandinistas. The method was initially called "Bi-Digital" or "Ring-Test" (Fundación Comunidad del Hospital Natural de Nicaragua, 1993:29). Bioenergetics is based on the applications of an electro-magnetic field between the patient, the medicaments and the healers. Based on this technique, the healer seeks to detect the illness, its possible causes and its treatment.

In Veracruz, healers, and ordinary people consistently employ various aspects from these elements during healing practices as well as in general medical activities and discourse. One good example is *calor de vista* (literally heat of gaze), or "evil eye", which is the combination of the classical Mediterranean evil eye with an illness ancient Nahua called *iscucuyalis*, which presents the same symptoms and etiology of evil eye. Friar Bobadilla reported in his chronicle how Indigenous people in Nicaragua believed in a deadly infant illness caused by simply staring at a child (Davila Bolaños 1974:52). Cosminsky (1976:164) argues that the concept of evil eye, which is "one of the most widespread folk beliefs concerning illness found in Spanish America", seems to have diffused to the New World from Spain. However, it is evident here how an Indigenous version of evil eye was already present in the Americas. Judeo-Christian elements, as well as many other aspects from the traditions mentioned above, constitute an important part of the ideational base of the Veracruceños' medical system. Nevertheless, this is not to say that la medicina Indígena in Veracruz is simply a compilation of filtered-down medical knowledge, or an assorted amalgamation of foreign and outdated ideas. Far from it, since old ideas in new contexts can be considered contemporary thoughts. Certainly, having elements of foreign origin in their medical system does not make it less authentic.

In general, Indigenous medicine in Veracruz, as in many other Indigenous societies in Latin American countries, seems to be constituted by a historical fusion of different medical traditions. For example, humoural medicine, found among Indigenous healers, herbalist and Indigenous healing consultants in Nicaragua, was once taught as simplified "scientific" medicine in Latin America schools until well into the nineteenth century (Foster 1980). "Curanderismos" as some Veracruceños also call their system, is a synthesized articulation of different medical beliefs and knowledge proceeding from multiple sources, particularly pre-Hispanic, colonial, oriental, modern and also decontextualized contemporary biomedicine, with a great tendency to integrate all of these elements in a sometimes ambiguous and contradictory discourse (Campos Navarro 1997:104).

> Just as in all societies many items of elite culture filtered down to popular levels, so had scientific medicine of the colonial period in Spanish America filtered down, in simplified form, to become the `traditional' popular medicine of city dwellers and rural folk alike, all the way from southwestern United Sates to Tierra del Fuego (Foster 1994:2).

This is not to say that Indigenous healing is simply a set of filtered-down medical knowledge, but rather to elucidate the point that contemporary Indigenous medicine in Veracruz is also constituted by medical ideas, which came from other medical systems. This is an important premise because, as Kleinman argues (1995:23), "there is no essential medicine, no medicine that is independent of historical context". Pigg (1995), in reference to the *dhâmi-jhânkris* in Nepal (roughly, shamans and other ritual specialist healers), also argues that it is not possible to recover a pure, authentic Indigenous belief system that is clearly separated from someone else's modern ideas. Therefore, it would be inaccurate to claim that traditional healing is a homogeneous social reality among Veracruceños. Due to the eclectic character of Indigenous medicine, Veracruceños' medical practices and ideology inevitably overlap with other medical traditions. It is in this way that it acquires a contemporary character. Therefore, to claim that traditional healing in Veracruz is a culturally homogeneous social reality could lead to a misapprehension of its ethnographic description.

The Medical Value of Medicine in Veracruz

Although politically significant, the non-medical purposes of medicine have secondary importance for Veracruceños. Medicine's pragmatic value in Veracruz is primarily based on its obvious, immediate medical benefits: it procures them health. At the existential level, health is the most highly valued possession for Veracruceños, more than land, money, and other material goods. For the majority of Veracruceños, approximately eighty-seven percent, health is the single most important feature of happiness, which they see as a holistic sense of well-being. For many people in Veracruz, it is pointless to accumulate material wealth if it is not going to be enjoyed by healthy individuals. This is not to say that they disregard material possessions and progress altogether. On the contrary, they maintain that only by being healthy can one achieve material progress. However, they also believe that paradoxically:

> *One should not kill oneself in a job that will bring good money, but also disease. Here in Veracruz, we always say that the greatest treasure one can have is one's health. An illness can strike at any moment for anyone. Sometimes it may warn you, some others it won't* (Arturón M.).

> *If one does not have health, what good is it to have other things? What good is it to have a nice house if one is too sick to enjoy it? Look at me! Here I am. I have material things, but what good are they if I can't enjoy them. That is why our Indigenous medicine is important; it brings us back our health* (Amalia M.).

Like the majority of underprivileged Nicaraguans, Veracruceños also face severe problems of malnutrition, poor sanitary conditions, and inadequate access to state healthcare and basic services. These conditions translate into poor health, pain, suffering, and even death. Table number 2.5 shows the most common illnesses Veracruceños claim afflict their community. Illness is an everyday reality in Veracruz, as it is all over Nicaragua (Sandoval 2003, personal communication). Given their precarious health conditions, in times of anguish, fear, and pain, Veracruceños seek the help of both traditional and biomedical healers. In Veracruz, seeking medical help is a need that can never be substituted. Getting sick is also a humbling experience. For Veracruceños, being sick is an imperative that defeats personal arrogance. The torment of pain and the anxiety created by a compulsive desire to stop it is a powerful unifying, consistent experience in Veracruz. This seems quite natural since the fear of pain and the certainty of death seem to be the most influential cohesive forces that compel societies everywhere to create and implement medical systems. "Investigators of illness and healing in different cultures have tended to agree on the universality of some aspects of health-seeking behaviour regardless of other manifest differences in those cultures" (Romanucci-Ross 1997:5). Albeit Veracruceños regard medicine as a secondary incidental condition that appears during the course of an illness, they also perceive illness, health and *la medicina Indígena* as entities that exist in a circle of mutual interdependency.

> *We can never be totally healthy because there is always sickness hovering over us. Health is acquired through medicine. Sometimes medicine can be more powerful than sickness, but sometimes it cannot, and so the circle goes on and on... Pain has its own language; sometimes it's hard to put it into words. Medicine works in the same way* (healer Agustina Pavón).

Although most Veracruceños are fully aware of the structural and social causes of illness, they also believe that, in general, illness is inherent to the human condition and therefore ultimately inevitable. In this sense, Indigenous medicine constitutes a cultural mechanism for responding and adapting to the demands of human suffering for Veracruceños, regardless of whether the causes the suffering are biological, social, or spiritual in origin. Finding a way of mitigating suffering involves more than the application of medical ideas and technology alone. It involves creating narratives, discourses, and metaphors about the nature and origin of the sicknesses that produces the suffering (Good 1994). As I shall discuss later in this chapter, health-seeking behavior in Veracruz also involves narratives about who they are ethnically, and how that ethnicity is expressed in the ways in which Veracruceños understand, perceive and experience an episode of illness. Nevertheless, the prime value of their medical system rests in its ability to procure health. In this sense, health is a precious commodity so badly needed in a society where illness is a common denominator.

Curanderos and Curanderas

The term *curandero* (male) or *curandera* (female) is the Spanish word for curer or healer. Healers in Veracruz are socially recognized part-time medical specialists who diagnose, treat, and alleviate disease. Veracruceños distinguish between four types of local *curanderos*. These are: *yerberos* (herbalists), *parteras* (midwives), *sobadors* (masseurs and bonesetters), and *brujos* (witches). Although all curanderos have other sources of income, they constitute a local occupational category. At the time of fieldwork, six people were socially recognized as formal Indigenous healers in Veracruz.

Name	Specialty	Gender	Years of service	Age
Agústina Pavón	partera/yerbera	female	50	90
Rafaela Carbonero	partera/yerbera	female	40	63
Dorotea Morales.	partera/yerbera	female	18	48
Felipe Urrutia	sobador/yerbero	male	30	60
Renato López	Sobador	male	35	56
Cipriano Martinez	Yerbero/brujo	male	37	57

Table 1.5 Veracruceño healers (2002)

Agustina Pavón is both the oldest person and the most senior healer in the group. Over twenty years ago, a woman in the village cast a spell on doña Agustina and her husband. He died. She survived, but lost her eyesight due to witchcraft. Remarkably, she has been working as a blind healer ever since the incident. Despite her visual challenge, Doña Agustina is an optimistic, gentle, wise and humble herbalist and midwife who enjoys treating children and counseling youth. Patiently, in a sweet and cracking but soothing voice, Agustina still persuades her little patients to comply with her medical advice. It is particularly difficult to make children drink the usually bitter tasting medication she prepares for them. At her age, 90 at the time of fieldwork, she continuous to carry out small household chores. Since healing is a part-time job, her children support her financially. At the time of fieldwork, she lived with her grandchildren and great grandchildren in the village and I have recently learned that she still does.

Rafaela Carbonero is the second senior healer of the group. Both an herbalist and a midwife, she is widely recognized both locally and regionally. She is a married woman who had ten children of which only eight are alive today. Doña Rafaela lives with her husband, two of her children, two grandchildren and one great grandchild in a modest brick and wood house. In her backyard, she raises pigs and chickens for domestic consumption and for commercial purposes. She is a soft-spoken, quiet but friendly person who prefers to stay home doing domestic chores to help her family, rather than being socially active in the community. Doña Rafaela, a Catholic herself, believes that her healing power ultimately comes from God, and that she is only an instrument of "His" power. Locally and regionally recognized a successful healer, she claims to be able to heal even illnesses that biomedicine or modern medicine is unable to successfully treat.

Dorotea Morales, the youngest of all the healers in Veracruz, is a serious woman with a sturdy personality. She lives with her three children as a single parent in the outskirts of the village, where she works in agricultural tasks and as a sales-person. She buys household items in Rivas, which later sells in Veracruz. At first, she seemed shy and unwilling to talk to me about her healing practices, but after a couple of visits, she started to confide in me, and was able to share some of her views on la medicina Indígena in a friendly and agreeable atmosphere. Over all, she was the healer with whom I spent the least time in the village. She would often tell me that there were other healers in the village with more experience than herself and that I should be talking to them instead.

Felipe Urrutia is a culturally conservative leader as well as an outgoing and charismatic healer. He claims to enjoy helping villagers and outsiders alike and proudly speaks about offering his medical services for free, and that, nevertheless, patients bring him gifts in gratitude. He is married and lives with his wife, four of his grownup children and two sons in law in an all-brick house. Felipe cultivates and exports bananas, and grows beans, corn and yuca for domestic consumption. Two of his male children live and work in Costa Rica. They come to visits during Christmas and other locally important holidays and send remittances occasionally. Felipe Urrútia was also the community's president during the time of my fieldwork.

Cipriano Martínez is undoubtedly the most controversial and respected healer in the community. He is married and has eight children and several grandchildren. He and his family own a small corner store and on weekends, their home functions as a dance hall and local bar. A homemade pool table is also available at his place for local entertainment at affordable prices. In 2002, don Cipriano opened a profitable cockfight ring that operates every other Sunday. During weekdays, the dance hall becomes the waiting room for his patients, and the small room that also functions as the bar's counter, is used as the physical space where consultations, divinations, and healing takes place. At least eight times a year, he fundraises for several community causes including the baseball team –of which he is the president- and the renovation of the Catholic temple in Rio Grande among others. Cipriano is a fervent Catholic devotee, a fulltime agriculture worker, and a mystic healer who enjoys bragging about his political and personal liaisons with local authorities in Rivas.

With the exception of Cipriano Martínez who I met by showing up at his place one morning, community leaders first introduced me to all local healers. After that, I would visit them on a regular basis to become acquainted with them and develop rapport. During my visits, I would bring gifts, interview them and observe some of the healing practices. Generally, they were all very open and willing to talk to me. I quickly developed a close relationship with most of them, but in particular with Cipriano, Agustina and Felipe.

Although many people in the village often engage in healing activities, not everyone is regarded as a formal healer. A healer's social recognition comes from years of experience and service, intense learning through apprenticeship, and a clear demonstration of having healing power or *el don de sanar* (See Madsen 1967 for a more thorough discussion of *el don de sanar* or the gift to heal). Usually this last prerequisite is acquired after successfully treating a serious or difficult illness. A successful healer is one who possesses an innate ability (el don) to diagnose and to heal both natural as well as imposed (mal p*uesto*) illnesses. It is quite common to describe the power to heal (el don) as a gift from God. Samoan and Tongan healers do the same, for instance, as do some shamans in many Indigenous societies (Young-Leslie 2005, personal communication).

It has been reported by Veracruceños that although el don is an innate ability, sometimes healers can lose the power to heal if they break some of the mystic rules on which this power is based. The healing power of healers in Veracruz entails three basic conditions: 1) the individual's sense of faith in the healing process, 2) a socially validated sense of medical truth about the process and 3) a generalized understanding of the medical authority and power of the healer, which can be either limited or enhanced by the power of God. This triadic relationship forms the basic cultural structure of the healing process in Veracruz.

Usually healers work in their own residence, but are also willing to do home-visits if required. While some healers have a designated healing space in their homes, others work anywhere suitable. With the exception of one healer, who only sees patients on certain days due to religious reasons, all the healers are virtually on call twenty-four hours a day. Healers in Veracruz treat a wide variety of physical and emotional problems. Although they specialize in treating what they called *enfermedades Indígenas* (Indigenous illnesses), they also take care of biomedical illnesses by incorporating aspects of biomedicine into their treatment regiments. The same "levels of treatment" delineated by Trotter and Chavira (1997) in their study of curanderismo in Texas, are also used by healers in Veracruz. These are: the material, the spiritual, and the mental. In Veracruz, the material level entails the use of a number of herbs, patent medicines, common household's items such as lemons, eggs, garlic, salt, animal lard, kerosene, honey, and building bricks[29], among many other substances. Religious articles, such as holy water or oil, incense, perfumes, votive candles, statues, and images of Catholic saints both officially canonize and popularize folk saints such as San Simon, San Cipriano, el Negro Cañas. At the spiritual level, Veracruceño healers are mediums that serve as guides for a wide array of spirits. They also provide spiritual etiologies, diagnoses, and remedies for a number of spiritual illnesses. As local medical authorities in the village, healers also inspire an ambivalent fusion of faith and fear in their patients. This ambivalence is an essential part of the spiritual level of healing because it plays an important role in reinforcing the patient's beliefs in the medical system. At the mental level, Veracruceño healers claim to channel mental energy from their minds directly to the afflicted part or psychological experience of patients. It is commonplace for healer to claim to be a *zahorí,* (a person with the faculty to see the occult), which they locally pronounce as zajurín.

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[29] Hot building bricks are put in water to warm it with medicinal purposes.

> *When I was a child, my grandfather, who was capable of seeing and understanding things that ordinary people would not, told me that I, too, had natural faculties to be a zajurín. That is why I decided to become a healer and help people. With the help of the spirit of el Moreno Cañas* [a deceased medical doctor form the 1960's who is said to have come in spirit to heal people in Costa Rica and Nicaragua], *I can see through the occult many of the things that happen to people that ordinary people cannot see. Many of the causes of illness that afflict our people are not just physical things that you can see with your eyes. That is why people think I am a brujo. I don't care what they say. I know I am not one* (don Cipriano Martinez).

Although everybody in the village knows that there are several curanderos *brujos* (witch healers) in the community, none of the healers will openly admit to being one. In part, this is due to the risk of being accused of causing harm to people through the use of witchcraft. In Veracruz, brujos are seen with ambivalence. On one hand, they are valued for their vital medical functions, especially in diagnosing and treating spiritual, as well as witchcraft related illnesses. On the other hand, they have come to be stigmatized as perverse and satanic. Some healers take advantage of this ambivalence and use witchcraft discourse to intimidate enemies and to evoke fear and respect from their patients, while overtly denying they practice any form of witchcraft. Only one curandero in Veracruz openly admits to working with the elements typically associated with brujos, although he claims not to be one. Healers who identify with the spirits of a diseased healer to treat their patients are regarded as brujos. In his curanderismo study of a small town in the Rio Grande Valley of south Texas, Rubel (1966:180) reports, "each curandero is closely identified with the spirit of a deceased healer". Taussig (1997:183-185) also tells how the photographs of Indigenous healers from the Putumayo region of Colombia also identify with deceased healers, who are later referred to as popular folk saints. Pictures of numerous popular folk saints such as the Negro Felipe, Maria Lionsa, and the Indio Guaicaipuro are used in Venezuela, Colombia, Panama, Bolivia, and Costa Rica. San Cipriano, San Simón, and el Negro Cañas are among the most commonly used saints in Veracruz by curanderos/brujos.

Healers in Veracruz make an important contribution to keeping the community healthy. Thus, they are regarded as community benefactors. However, since they are part of an occupational category, some healers also charge fees for their healing services, arguing that in doing so people will respect and appreciate their work. Some others do not openly charge, but implicitly expect some reciprocity. People often bring a gift in return for medical services. In general, Veracruceño healers are held in high esteem as insightful, wise, and creative individuals who serve an important social, political, symbolic, religious, and medical function

Sickness Categories (Nosology)

The following table shows, in alphabetical order, the most common illnesses recognized and treated by Veracruceños, as it was expressed to me during many interviews. Although some of the sickness categories in Veracruz have a clear biomedical origin, they have been locally incorporated into the Veracruceño medical configurations. In this way, new medical ideas and practices being material, social, or ideological are then *autochthonized* by becoming an integral part of the vernacular medical systems.

The asterisks indicate the sickness that most Veracruceños emphatically regard as *enfermedades Indígenas* (Indigenous illnesses) or the theoretical equivalent of what is debatably referred to in medical anthropology as "culture-bound syndromes". This is by no means to imply that biomedical sickness categories are *real entities*, rooted in some biological property, by only to illustrate the distinction most Veracruceños make between Indigenous illnesses and non-Indigenous ones. It is clear that the inclusion of culture-bound syndromes in DSM-IV (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders - Fourth Edition) has only reinforced the fallacious dichotomy between "real pathology, which is believed to reflect disordered physiology, and folk pathology, which is believed to be false, hence cultural (Good 1994:10). Notwithstanding this debate, very often, Veracruceños claim that some of the Indigenous illnesses are neither socially nor clinically recognized by biomedicine because medical doctors do not understand the Indigenous culture of which these illnesses are an essential part. I see no issues of asymmetrical validity in this classification, but only specific claims that ultimately all illnesses exist in particular, cultural and historical context in any society. This is consistent with Lock's argument, in which she claims that:

> Concepts of health and illness are based on, among other things, value systems and both individual and collective experiences; they are therefore culture-bound

> and subject to changes according to their historical and social context. As explanations for health and illness change with the mores of the time, actual medical theory and practice change, and these in turn have an effect on the epidemiology of disease (1980:1).

In this respect, I also take biomedical sickness categories as inherently culture-specific syndromes, which Veracruceños distinguish from their own vernacular categories not in terms of its clinical validity, but on grounds of cultural relevance. This differentiation is important because, as it is evident in the ethnographic testimonies, most Veracruceños regard their medical configurations as culturally unique and as having a particular relationship to their Indigenous history and identity.

Table 2.5 The 100 most common illnesses in Veracruz.[30]

Aborto	Abortion
Aire *	Pain caused by air trapped in the body
Alcoholismo	Alcoholism
Anemia	Anemia
Artritis	Arthritis
Asma	Asthma
Ataque al corazón	Heart Attack
Baja presión	Low blood pressure
Berija ciega *	Blind gall bladder
Bronquitis	Bronchitis
Caída de Cabello	Hair loss
Calentura	Fever
Calor *	Body heat
Calor de Vista *	Eyesight heat* (Veracruceño evil eye)
Cáncer en la matriz	Womb cancer
Cataratas	Cataracts
Ceguera	Blindness
Chimborones *	Feminine homosexuality
Chistate *	Abdominal burning sensation and heaviness
Colesterol	Cholesterol
Constipado *	Common Cold
Cresta de Gallo *	Cock crest sexually transmitted disease

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[30] The number is coincidental. It bears no particular meaning.

Depresión	Depression
*Desgano **	Lack of appetite
Desnutrición	Malnutrition
Diabetes	Diabetes
Diarrhea	Diarrhea
Dolor de cabaña	Headache
*Dolor de cabaña poor horn **	Headache caused by baking
*Dolor de canillas **	Leg pain
Dolor de salad	Backache
Dolor de echo	Chest pain
Dolor de odious	Earache
Dolor de job	Eye-ache
*Dolor en los huezos **	Bone-ache
Dolor menstrual	Menstrual pain
*Empacho **	Indigestion
*Entuerto **	Postpartum pain
Epilepsia	Epilepsy
Falta de dientes	Lack of teeth
*Fatiga **	Fatigue
*Flor blanca **	White flower (white vaginal discharge)
Flujo vaginal	Vaginal discharge
Fracturas	Bone fracture
Ganglios	Ganglions
Gastritis	Gastritis
*Gusanillo **	Little worm
Hemorragia	Bleeding
Hemorroides	Hemorrhoids
Hepatitis	Hepatitis
Hernia	Hernia
*Hinchazón estomacal **	Abdominal distension
Inflamación	Swelling
*Locura **	Madness
Lombrices alborotadas	Parasites, stomach worms
*Mal aire **	Evil air
Manchas en la cara	Facial stains
Desgano	Lack of appetite
Mezquinos	Warts
Migraña	Migraine
Mongolito	Down syndrome
Mollera caída	Fallen fontanel
*Moto blanco **	White tetanus
*Moto negro **	Black tetanus
*Moto pasado **	Advanced tetanus
Mudez	Muteness
Mujer sexualmente alterada	Sexually altered women
*Nervios**	Nervous (general anxiety)

Neumonía	Pneumonia
Ojos rojos	Red eyes
*Parto seco**	Dry birth
Picada de insecto	Insect bite
*Picazón de vagina**	Vaginal itchiness
Piquete de alacrán	Scorpion bite
Piquete de avispa	Bee sting
Piquete de culebra	Snake bite
Polio	Polio
Presión alta	Pressure
Problema de la vista	Eye sight problems
Problema de riñón	Kidney problems
Próstata	Prostate problems
*Pujo**	Infant constipation
*Quebranto**	Child sadness
Resfrío	Common cold
*Retina seca**	Dry eyes
Salpullido	Rash
*Sangre lluvia **	hemorrhage
Sordera	Deafness
*Susto**	Fright
*Temperamento**	Bad temper
Tos	Cough
Tos y flemas	Cough and phlegm
Tumor	Tumor
Tumor de útero	Uterus tumor
Tumores de mama	Breast tumor
Tumores de ovarios	Ovaries tumor
Várices (f)	Varicose veins
Vesícula	Vesicular
*Vientre helado **	Cold womb
*Vista pobre**	Poor eye sight

A Brief Veracruceño Pharmacopoeia

Veracruceño local pharmacopoeia combines Indigenous herbal wisdom with other historical medical traditions and contemporary biomedical medicaments. It is common for some healers in Veracruz to give injections of Complex B vitamins and penicillin as well as pills for *los nervios* or nerves (see Scheper-Hughes 1992, for a rich discussion on nervios). Plants, minerals, and animals constitute the basis of the Veracruceños medicinal repertoire. With the reinvigoration of Indigenous healing in Veracruz, community leaders routinely encourage villagers to cultivate medicinal plants as a way of maintaining the Indigenous tradition of herbal medicine. In 2000, leaders started a local youth program to teach students to cultivate and learn about the medicinal value of plants.

> *We believe that by keeping our traditional knowledge about medicinal plants, we are also maintaining an important aspect of our culture and Indigenous identity. We have traditionally had a special relationship with nature. Nature gives us life, food, and medicine. Here, every adult treats at least eighty percent of their ordinary medical complaints with herbs and plants before going to the government medical post. Having medicinal plants in our gardens is not only useful and convenient; it's also a cultural manifestation of our ancestral identity* (ccl. Alfredo López).

> *Here in our garden we have medicinal plants for almost all of the illnesses we treat in our community. I learned how to identify plants because my mother used to tell me about each plant and what their healing properties are. But even if I don't have a particular plant in my garden for an illness, chances are my neighbors have it. Sometimes you can find the medicine in the bush. I also keep oils and fat from animals that we use for healing* (Agustina Pavón).

Medicinal plants in Veracruz are socially valued given their healing powers and their association with Indigenous material culture. Although very useful and in high demand, medicinal plants have no monetary value for Veracruceños. People collect them from their gardens, the wild or they are exchanged for free in a system of general reciprocity.

> *Whenever we are sick, we find our medicine in nature. That is why you cannot sell nor buy the herbs and plants that have healing powers. That is how we learned it from our ancestors. These plants are precious, but nature gives them to us free so we give them free, too* (Felipe Urrútia, healer)

The most commonly used medicinal plants in the community are: alfalfa, balm gentle, basil, camphor seeds and leaves, cinnamon bark, fennel, lavender, larkspur, lemon leaves, mint, orange blossoms, pennyroyal, rosemary, rose of Castile, rue, linden, and wild marjoram. Snake, oxen, pork, and armadillo as well as birds, and fish oil are commonly used to treat various illnesses. Veracruceños also use clay, salt, rocks, gold, silver, crystal, and other minerals as medications.

Local Etiologies

Etiology plays an important role in the classification of illness for Veracruceños. Depending on the origin of the illness, a set of identical symptoms can be caused by different illnesses. Although in general, Veracruceños believe in the divine origin of illnesses, as did the ancient Nahua people of Nicaragua (Davila Bolaños (1974:38), Veracruceños etiological theories can be divided between two main types of illnesses: *enfermedades comunes* (common or natural illnesses) and *mal puesto*[31] (cast evil or witchcraft). Some of the natural illnesses in Veracruz are explained in terms of humoural pathology; imbalances caused by exposure to cold air, overeating of "hot " or "cold" food, viruses and bacteria, physical or psychological trauma, exposure to poisonous fumes, ingestion of poisonous substances, animal bites, and lack of proper nutrition. A *mal puesto* is part of a personalistic, and sometimes moralistic, system and can be caused by the active, purposeful intention of a *sensate* agent, who may be supernatural such as a deity or a god, or non-human beings such as ghosts, ancestors, or evil spirits, or human beings such as a brujo or an *hechicero* (sorcerer) (Foster 1978). Nevertheless, in Veracruz there are certain instances where a person can unintentionally cause illness, such is the case of *vista fuerte* (strong gaze or eyesight), which causes calor de vista in children. Judeo-Christian beliefs of sinful behaviour are another explanation for the course of some illnesses. Moral rule breaking, social disharmony, vengeance, improper behaviour, God's will, and bad luck are also seen as explanations of *mal puestos* in Veracruz. As described by Foster (1978), in a personalistic medical system, through sickness people are victim to the object of aggression or punishment. This model fits the description of etiological theories in Veracruz.

Another aspect of Veracruceños' etiology involves differentiating illnesses, not in terms of the signs, symptoms, or the causing agent, but rather, based on the origin of the causing agent. For example, in Murdock's (1980) classic taxonomy, viruses, bacteria, and accidents are regarded as natural causes. In Veracruz, however, even a virus, which is clearly a natural agent for Veracruceños, can sometimes be understood as stemming from a source beyond the natural realm. In fact, two people may be afflicted by the same illness, present identical signs, express similar symptoms, but have different etiologies. In Veracruz, a person can get a virus from a casual encounter with an individual who is sick or induced by witchcraft. Favret-Saada (1980) addresses similar issues by exploring the ultimate cause of the illness and going beyond the mechanical virus theory. It is not so much the cause of the illness that matters to Veracruceños, as much as the source of the cause. Thus, even seemingly natural processes can also be measured in supernatural ways because moral and intentional realms link the two illness categories.

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[31] Madsen (1973) describes the same term to denote witchcraft in a small rural community in the lower Rio Grande Valley in the south of Texas.

Social Tensions, Witchcraft, Health, Illness, and Medicine

What is relevant to my study is not so much how witchcraft is a form of social control (Evans-Pritchard, 1976) or the expression of envy (Foster 1972), although it may accomplish both. What matters here is how witchcraft is intricately linked to ideas about health and illness, misfortune, and material progress and how it provides an explanatory model (Kleinman 1995) for illness experiences. Henceforth I shall refer to it as *medical witchcraft* to distinguish it from ordinary witchcraft. The predominance, with which people perceive the experiences of health and illness and their ramifications in terms of the absence or presence of witchcraft, reveals how Veracruceños see their social life as embedded in a pervasively medical and magical world. Medical witchcraft in Veracruz is an expression of socially caused illnesses, which are derived from everyday social tensions caused by economic disparities and an endemic history of poverty and material deprivation suffered by Veracruceños as members of an ethnic minority. In this way, medical witchcraft also mediates these difficult extremes at the individual level— and at the same time reifies Indigenous identity at the social level.

At first glance, it seems that no one in Veracruz has ever witnessed, carried out, or suffered the consequences of witchcraft; or at least, no one will ever admit it to any stranger. It was only after I gradually became part of the everyday life in the village that I was able to learn about the prevalence of medical witchcraft. As a mystical, medical, and social phenomenon, medical witchcraft has been, and continues to be, a fundamental part of the every day life of Veracruceños. The cultural realty of witchcraft is ingrained in the social, psychological, and medical life of Veracruceños. It serves to conceptualize the allocation of health, illness, misfortune, punishment, and reward in the form of material progress, as well as successful social and intimate relationships. Out of the eighty people I interviewed on the issue of witchcraft, not a single person admitted to having visited any brujo (witch) with goals other than medical ones, hence, medical witchcraft. It seems then, that although many Veracruceños were getting sick through witchcraft, no one was causing the illness or at least claiming to.

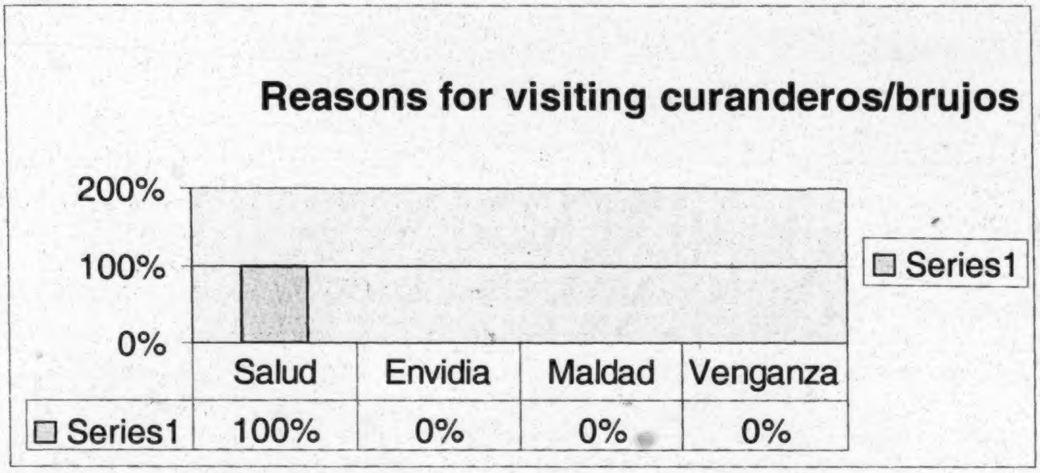

Table 3.5 Reasons people claim motivated them to visit curanderos/brujos. Health (100%), envy (0%), evilness (0%), vengeance (0%), from a sample of 50 people randomly chosen.

Obviously, no one wanted to admit to having ever hired the services of a brujo to do harm to others. Most of the witchcraft victims I interviewed told me they suspected who had been the person responsible for bringing the illness. However, they all carefully emphasized how they had gone to see the healer in search of medical help, not for vengeance.

As a medico-magical phenomenon, witchcraft in Veracruz is not defined neatly in a single discourse. Rather, as an illness, witchcraft is a complex, ambiguous, and often "equivocal" category that is subject to multiple interpretations and experiences (Fletcher 2002:14). Elena Montes, the wife of a prominent community and religious leader, exemplifies this ambivalence. Although there are underpinning generalizations, not all people in the community relate to witchcraft in the same way. Elena, like many others, is simultaneously both publicly distrustful but privately convinced of the power of witchcraft. On one hand, Elena overtly criticizes the paranoia of some people who, what seems to her, take extreme views and fear that even a simple cold may be the workings of witchcraft. On the other hand, she admits to its validity and imminent danger.

> *People who attribute every single illness or misfortune to witchcraft are really dangerous because they can wrongly accuse you of witchcraft. If they don't like you, they can accuse you. However, I know there are few cases in which an illness is clearly caused by witchcraft* (Elena Montes).

Veracruceños identify two types of witchcraft: *brujería mala* or *negra* (evil or black witchcraft) and *brujería buena* or *blanca* (good or white witchcraft) or what I call here medical witchcraft. The two kinds of witchcraft represent the classical religious dichotomy of good and evil. The former is, for Veracruceños, a clear manifestation of the devil's will to do harm, and the latter is the omnipotent and merciful healing power of God. Veracruceños believe that magical power is neutral; it only acquires healing or harmful powers when it is infused with either one by human intentions. Witchcraft is only an instrument through which good and evil can be expressed and reified. That is why it is capable of providing an explanation for suffering and the technology and knowledge for healing.

Only in the last fifteen years have people, chiefly members of the Evangelical Church, started advocating that all forms of magical healing, especially witchcraft, are based on satanic powers. "A good Christian should not partake nor tolerate any form of witchcraft", a non-Indigenous local minister emphatically told me. Members of the Catholic faith, however, routinely diagnose and treat witchcraft-related illnesses. In fact, all healers and known brujos in Veracruz identify themselves as Catholic. The fact that healers/brujos claim to be members of the Catholic Church makes it less contradictory for Catholic patients to accept witchcraft as an effective healing practice. With no exceptions, healers in Veracruz conspicuously use Catholic icons, chants, recitations, and prayers during their healing sessions. Their clinical settings are filled with Catholic ornaments, pictures, images, statutes, and other religious paraphernalia. Furthermore, most, if not all, of their magical verbal formulas and incantations are based on, or accompanied by, Catholic prayers such as *Our Father*, *Hail Mary*, or the *Nicene Creed.* Unofficial Catholic symbols are also used. Non-canonized but regionally venerated saints, such as San Simón and San Cipriano, for example, are used as icons and as healing agents. The psycho-religious impact prayers have on patients facilitates the acceptance and internalization of medical witchcraft as a superior medical practice by giving it an aura of legitimization and cultural consent.

Veracruceños' medical reality exists in a space in which the presumably discrete demarcations between the objective and the subjective are not clearly defined. Through magical healing and/or medical witchcraft, Veracruceños move in-and-out of the boundaries between everyday life and a timeless, sacred, but also contemporary order of reality. Two worlds coexist. Spirits, mystical powers, and dangers rule one world, while the everyday mundane social tensions and gratifications regulate the other. In the complexity of social existence, people seem to both fearfully respect and daringly transgress those boundaries. As a fundamental part of their medical ideology, witchcraft serves as an explanatory model for misfortune, sickness, health, but also for material and social progress. It is one expression of the meaningful self among many meaningful selves, because individual experiences are meaningful only in relation to the social context in which they are experienced. Medical beliefs and practices serve as the ideological background in which bodily and spiritual dissonance, pain, affliction, and discomfort, however horrible and disagreeable they may be, make perfect sense. Curanderos then, help individuals to break and restore social and spiritual barriers by the appropriation of the ideology (common symbols, meanings and beliefs) used in the community (see Lévi-Strauss 1963 for similar observations). The use of symbols, tangible and ideological, according to Levi-Strauss, plays an important role in reinforcing the patient's beliefs. Through the appropriation of symbols, healers also provide ideological mechanism for "fabulation" consisting of procedures and representations of an unknown reality (Lévi-Strauss 1963).

The tensions created by the discontinuity between health and illness, material progress, and misfortune are, if not alleviated, mitigated by medical explanations that address the clinical and the social dimensions of each state. Ideologically, Veracruceños use medical witchcraft as a field to play out the political economy of fear and moral panic as a form of etiological theory of misfortune, which manifests itself as a somatic or spiritual illness.

General witchcraft beliefs do not constitute a primordial, bounded total system, torn loose from any social context, in this case a medical one. This vision fails to capture the fluid manner in which villagers simultaneously invoke medical witchcraft as they encounter perplexing events, experience prolonged conflict in marriage, or suffer misfortunes (Niehuas 2001:192). Medical witchcraft is based on the interactions between specific individuals, who share a particular cultural context from which they unconsciously abstract meanings to construct it as a *primordial experience* through *habitus*. According to Bourdieu (1979: vii), habitus is the embodied way in which we engage in the world: "a system of durable, transposable dispositions which functions as the generative basis of structured, objectively unified practices". In the conclusion of this dissertation, I will address in more detailed this idea and its relation to identity formation through the use of medical symbols.

The testimonies that follow are based on interviews with both healers and patients involved in medical witchcraft. I collected these testimonies over several interviews during my fieldwork. These narratives elucidate important aspects of how Veracruceños link Indigenous medicine to their ethnic identity through the construction of misfortune and the medicalization of witchcraft. Above all, these narratives are important because they show the ways in which sickness and healing acquire the status of primordial experiences for Veracruceños. I have chosen these particular testimonies because they are representative of a broad range of narratives provided by patients in similar circumstances. First, Carlota Campos tells the story of her son Manuel and their distressful experience with a witchcraft caused illness. Second, Alex Morales, who I introduce in more detail later, shares his views and experiences of witchcraft as an everyday reality. Next, I present the testimony of Cipriano Martinez for two main reasons: First, he is the only publicly recognized brujo in the village, and second no other healer was willing to talk to me about witchcraft in Veracruz. His narratives are insightful, reveling, and in some respect, representative of the general discourse and social practice of medical witchcraft in Veracruz.

The Story of Manuel Told by his Mother, Carlota

The day of the meeting with doña Carlota, I arrived with my video camera, greeted her, and came into the corridor. I sat down and began to set up the videotaping equipment on a bench. Doña Carlota was eager to tell me the story of her son, Manuel. It was as if she were seeking a righteous judge to appraise the injustice. She wanted to express how, through witchcraft, envious people in the village had unfairly victimized her son. As soon as I started to talk to her about Manuel, she gently hushed me and secretly signaled that he was around. "He doesn't want me to talk about what happened to him," doña Carlota whispered to me. Then, she pretended we were talking about something else and artificially started a different conversation. She was plucking corn kernels off several cobs. When Manuel left, I set the camera and started to videotape the interview. Then she commenced the story by saying:

In this Indigenous community, many horrible things can happen. I think most people are kind and generous, but you always get those who are envious and hateful. They can't stand seeing you progress. It makes them sick. That is why my son Manuel went crazy. An enemy of the family put a curse on him because they were envious of how well we were doing. We are not rich. No one is rich here, but some people thought we were. The days when my son was sick were especially hard for me. Seeing my son bare-naked, lonely, and violent was deeply sad for me. My husband even had to tie up Manuel's hands. That made me cry a lot. I thought it was so unfair; Manuel was a good kid. He was just fifteen.

I remember that horrible day when our Calvary began. As usual, that morning we went to the Rivas' market to sell corn, beans, and cereals, you know. The whole morning was apparently normal. We didn't notice anything unusual. Apparently, Manuel felt fine. However, things drastically changed when we came back home. Manuel sat down and ate. Then, he said to me, "Mom, I have a horrible headache and a strange desire to kill or to be killed." "Don't say crazy things," I scolded him. "No, mama, really, this headache isn't a joke," he told me, while grabbing and rubbing his head violently. I quickly went into my bedroom to fetch a bottle of holy water. "Here," I said, and started to gently bath his head with that holy water. It worked. He calmed down and slept for an hour. That was just a brief relief. Around two o'clock he woke up and said to me, "Mama, I'm going to go to the bull rodeo." "No," I replied, "it's better if you don't. You're not feeling very well." "No, mother, I'm fine now. The headache is almost gone," he assured me. "Ok, then, go," I said. "Just don't come back late," I added. "Don't worry," he said, "I won't be late."

Around nine at o'clock, he came back very sick again. "Mama, I can't stand this headache any more," he shouted, and kept hitting himself on the head. It was around Christmas time. I was cooking a special seasonal dish and had food on my hands. So, I asked my daughter-in-law Celina to sprinkle some more holy water on his head. She did, and at my request, she gave him a painkiller pill too. It was December 14. I remember the sorrow of that day very clearly. Finally, Manuel went to sleep. The next day Manuel woke up with the same horrible headache. That's when I told my husband Julio that our son Manuel was very sick, and that we should take him to be seen by a healer. They are, really, good at telling what's wrong with people who are sick. In fact, I'd already taken

Manuel to see a healer for a different problem. Once he got very sick with excessive sweating. The healer told us that the excessive sweating was a result of a weak body defenses. I told my husband that Manuel's headache was a serious problem, and should not be taken lightly. My husband didn't want us to take Manuel to see a healer. He thought non-Indigenous healers were all charlatans and frauds. My son Paco intervened and said, "Well, then, in that case, I'll take Manuel, Mama." "Alright, son," I said gratefully to Paco and gave him some money and instructions as to where he should take Manuel. "You know how to read, Paco, so when you get to the city, make sure you read the sign that says Naturopath." That healer understands our problems and knows Indigenous healing. My two children left for Rivas. I didn't take him to see the local healer because we didn't want anybody in the village to learn about our problem.

Once they arrived in Rivas, Manuel pleaded with Paco not to go where I had told them. Instead, Manuel asked to go to see his godmother because he felt better going to see her. To be kind, Paco accepted and took him there. You see, my comadre (Manuel's godmother) *is a very famous healer in San Jorge. However, she is not an Indigenous person. Her name is Sonia Cajina and she lives near the* (Cosibolca Nicaragua) *lake. But, can you believe that although she is Manuel's godmother, she still charged us 1,000 Córdobas for her useless treatment* (the equivalent of one and a half months minimum wages in Nicaraguan minimum wage). *Although she is not an Indigenous healer, she is supposedly a good healer. Anyway, Sonia examined Manuel and told Paco to leave him at her place for a week. "Come back Saturday to pick him up and he'll be totally cured," she authoritatively assured Paco. Manuel said it was fine. He wanted to stay. But before*

Paco left, he had to give Sonia an advance from the 1,000 Córdobas she was going to charge for her services.

The next day, on Tuesday morning, I went to see Manuel at San Jorge and brought him some food I cooked. When I arrived, Manuel was eagerly sipping some chicken soup in a glass bowl. My comadre Sonia *was surprised and not very pleased to see me there. She assured me that she was taking good care of my son, and that there was no need for me to be there. How strange, she said that because Manuel was still crying and his headache was still very bad. "Has she given you any medicine?" I asked Manuel. "No, she hasn't," Manuel sadly replied. "Comadre," I protested, "how come you haven't given him any medicine if we gave you money? Manuel is now worse off here. At home, at least, we try to relieve his headache, but here, you haven't given him anything," I bitterly protested. Immediately, Sonia sent a little girl to the store to get some painkillers. As soon as the little girl came back, I gave him two pills. I was very upset, to say the least. Perhaps because Sonia had other patients at her place, she had neglected her own godson. Manuel still looked very sick. When I was ready to leave, Manuel asked me to bring him an image of the Veracruz (*the True Cross*). I told him that it was going to be hard to get one. So instead, I gave him the prayer of the Holy Cross I was carrying with me. "See," I gently said to him, "the image of the Holy Cross printed on this prayer is the same as the one you're asking me for." He took it and read it passionately several times, crying all the while. Then, he wiped his tears and said, "don't worry, Mother, I'll get better. Please, pray to the Holy Cross so that I get better soon". It was hard. It was sad. All of a sudden, my comadre asked me to leave him alone and not to worry. I left her place, and went to the pharmacy to get some more medicine for Manuel.*

When I was coming back from the pharmacy, I decided to pass by my market stall. To my surprise, Manuel was sitting there, patiently waiting for me. "Manuel," I asked him in distress, "what have you done? It's 1,000 córdobas that we have paid for your treatment, and she hasn't given you anything yet," I said. He, however, didn't seem to care or understand what I was saying. "What a pity," I said, "no one knew about your condition, but now everybody will laugh at you and me," I said to him in a gentle but disapproving voice. He looked horrible. His eyes were twitching. He couldn't fix his gaze on anything. "All right, take me back then," he mumbled. Somehow, I managed to convince him to go back to his godmother. So, I took him there. After a while, I went back to the village.

Now, when I think back, I regret having left him there. Had I known he was going to get worse that night, I wouldn't have left him with Sonia. But how was I supposed to know? Not even Sonia knew when Manuel went out of the house. Manuel told me that he left Sonia's because, that night, a big swine came to his room. He was afraid and ran away. Manuel wandered for while aimlessly, and ended up in San Jorge's main plaza. There he ran into a dangerous youth gang. As he passed by, one of them said, "I know who you are". Manuel was frightened, but God is so merciful that they didn't harm him; somehow he managed to the leave the plaza and hid behind a house. There, he took off all of his clothes and started to walk home to Veracruz. On the way home, a woman who recognized him gave him some trousers. When he arrived home, he was very dirty and shaggy. There he told me what I just told you. I cried a lot. That day his headache diminished, but his craziness got worse. He never went back to his godmother.

I remember that on December 24, Christmas Day (in Latin America, Christmas Day is celebrated on Christmas' eve) *he went completely nuts. He didn't even know who I was any more and started to hit me really hard. My face was blue and swelled by all the savage blows he gave me. One of my sisters would tell me, "Carlota! Don't let him hit you like that," "Let him kill me, if he has to," I replied in anguish. "He doesn't know what he's doing," I shouted, soaking with tears. After the first attack, every time Manuel tried to hit me, my sisters and my other children would get very angry and hit Manuel back with a big stick really hard on his hands. It was horrible to watch my son being beaten like that. I felt profound sorrow in my heart. It was such a torment and still is to remember his suffering.* [At that point I stopped the video camera and told her that she did not have to keep on telling me the story of Manuel if it was painful for her. She insisted and told me that she wanted to tell me. Thus, we carried on.

To deter his violent outbursts, Paco and my husband would tie up Manuel's hands and feet. He couldn't eat by himself any more. Manuel had to be spoon-fed. I felt so hopeless and feared that I was never going to see him healthy again. He started to look very wasted, really emaciated. It was horrible. We had to keep him locked up at all times.

In early January, we took him to see both healers and medical doctors in the village. However, no one would cure him. I did not tell the medical doctor that what Manuel had was mal aire (evil wind) because they don't believe in this kind of illness. They don't understand them. Only traditional healers and us Indigenous people understand this kind of illness. So then, I took him to Diriomo, where the best curanderos are supposed to be. There, I was told that an ill wind, a bad spirit, was cast upon Manuel and that had made him crazy. At the end of the healing session, the healer asked my *husband to bring all the names of possible enemies of the family. "When you have the names ready, come and see me during a new moon," the healer said. We did so. The following healing session, the healers told us he knew who had made Manuel sick. My son Paco wanted to retaliate. The whole thing was a tormenting experience for all of us. "I want to see the person who has done this to my brother under the same torment," said Paco, furiously. It was not a small thing. The situation affected us all terribly. However, none of the healers who had seen Manuel was willing to retaliate. They told us that if we wanted vengeance we should seek help somewhere else. Finally, healer Alberto Calvariano in Diriomo told us that he could do it. But, the day we took Manuel to see Calvariano, he wasn't home. He had gone to the airport to see off one of his sons who was leaving for the United States. So we were told that Manuel couldn't be seen that day by the healer. We were seven people in a taxi. Only three of us stayed in Diriomo. Fortunately, one of my husband's cousins had some friends in Diriomo and so we were able to stay at their place for the night. In the end, we weren't interested in retaliating. We'd rather leave things to God.*

Manuel went everywhere with his hands bound. It was easier to control his constant violent outbreaks this way. I remember one time we took him to Diriomo. He broke a couple of chairs at the house where we were staying. Only a healer from Diriomo was actually able to control Manuel's sickness for a little while. Although less frequent, Manuel would still have furious outbursts. I suffered, watching my other children hitting Manuel so hard to calm him down.

Manuel wouldn't listen to any of us. The only person he would listen to was my older brother Mauricio. Manuel seemed to like him more than his paternal uncle Fermín, *who was also very close to the family. In fact, Mauricio was also like a father to me. That is why sometimes Mauricio would stay with us at night. One day Mauricio helped me take Manuel to a healer's house. As usual Manuel made a terrible scene there. As soon as we arrived, Manuel wet his pants in the middle of the living room. I was suffering tremendously while laboriously trying to find a way to clean his mess. It was so embarrassing, to say the least. You should have seen the healer's living room. It was sparking clean when we got there. It was very sad. Manuel had no idea what he was doing. He would softly tell me, "let's go home mama... Look! Can you see the hill over there? That's where I'm going," he would say with an empty gaze. 'No son, you're going over there instead," I told him. "We are going home, instead," I added.*

Waiting for the bus was always terrible. For instance, if for some reason a bus wouldn't stop, Manuel would get very mad and violent. His older brothers would beat him up with stick right there on the road. That would make me mad, too. "Please, don't hit him. Kill me first and then you can kill him," I would shout trying to contain my tears. But at the same time, I understood their frustration and anger. They were just trying to protect me from Manuel's vicious attacks. They just wanted to see their brother healthy again.

Unlike Miguel and Marlon (Manuel's brothers), *who were always mad at Manuel and spoke harshly to him, Mauricio was very patient and gentle with him. I think this is why Mauricio was the only person Manuel would listen to. "Are we going to go to see the healer Manuel?" Mauricio would gently ask. "Yes, we are," Manuel would meekly reply. That's how we managed to take Manuel to see different healers during all those long months. Manuel would calmly walk behind my brother Mauricio.*

We tried many things and many ways of healing Manuel. Even people from the local evangelical church would come to pray for him. But Manuel would swear and say, "Go away! You're a bunch of faggots." Seriously, that's what he shouted at them in his madness. He couldn't stand the Protestants. However, when the Catholic priest would come to see him, Manuel behaved respectfully and submissively.

Almost a year later, Manuel started to show some signs of real improvement. There had been one point at which Manuel would not speak anymore. The healing power of Calvariano wasn't good enough for my son's condition. So, someone in the village told us to take my son to northern Nicaragua to see an infallible Indigenous healer there. We went there by car. It was a very expensive trip. A friend from Rivas who has a car offered to take us there for small fee. That was good for I wasn't going to go alone with my son on a bus. I already told you how difficult it was to control him. Eventually, four of us went to this northern town, my husband, the driver, Manuel and I. It was a long trip, six hours. We arrived at the healer's house around two o'clock and waited for a while. When we finally saw the healer, I didn't tell him anything about Manuel or why we had come to see him. However, amazingly, the healer was able to tell me everything that had happened to our family. He asked me to stand up on a tile on the floor. Then he commanded Manuel to stand on a different tile, "you shall be fine soon, son," said the healer to Manuel. Obediently, Manuel stood up right where the healer had indicated him to do so. "Look," the healers said, as we both were standing there. "Your son has been suffering from a terrible headache. You make a lot of money, but because a curse was cast on your home, you only see the money you earn, but you can't enjoy it because it is quickly gone. Right?" Everything the healer was telling me was true about my life, our *lives. He continued telling me, "I see that one day some people made you cry, and a woman came up to help you out". That was true, you know. I remember that a long time ago, when I was a little girl at the market place, there were two women who hated me and would hit me with a stool every time they had a chance. I would just cry. My mother would tell me to ignore any provocation and to stay away from trouble. She also used to say to me, "remember, that sticks and stones can break your bones, but words can never hurt you." But, one day these two women were hitting me for no reason. A woman who was there and saw what was happening, pulled out a huge knife and told them that whatever problem they had with me they also had it with her. "You should be ashamed," she told them. "You are picking on Carlota because she is meek; but I'm not," she bravely told them. From that day on, they never bothered me again.*

We learned about this healer because the driver who took us there is from the same town as the healer. So because he knew all about the healing procedure, he had told us, in advance, to bring a urine sample from Manuel. So we did. The healer used the sample to determine what was wrong with Manuel; and in fact, he told us. The healer gave us plenty of medicine for Manuel. During the examination, the healer would touch different parts of Manuel's head and would ask him if he felt any pain in the areas he touched. Manuel answered "yes" to all the areas the healer touched, but the healer could also tell where it hurt. The healer hit Manuel's back with some sort of dried strip of animal skin. He also hit Manuel's knees because they felt "unsteady and weak", according to the healer. Manuel didn't mind being hit. Manuel stood calm throughout the treatment. By the time the healer had finished, Manuel felt much better. As a mater of *fact, we didn't have to tie his hands any longer. Thank God, we went home with a different Manuel.*

I never went back again because it was a long and arduous trip. Only my husband went a couple to times get more medicine in order to continue the treatment. However, in a matter of a week, Manuel was totally cured. He was, again, the Manuel I knew. The healer gave us a prayer that we were supposed to recite at home. We did for many months. Now, I don't know where it is. I guess we probably lost it when we moved things around the house. During most of his sickness, Manuel had stayed at his grandmother's. When he was finally cured, he was able to recognize his grandmother's place and told me that he didn't live there. So, he asked me to bring him home.

Now Manuel is a normal young man, loving and friendly. We never talk about what happened to him at all. It's better that way. I've told you because you showed interest, and I wanted you to know that there are mean and envious people around us everywhere. People cast mal aire (evil wind) because they feel terrible envy when someone they know is prospering. People who truly believe in God don't cast curses and don't feel envy. People who cast curses are evil people; they do not believe in or fear God. We could have retaliated and sought vengeance, but we didn't. God will take care of things.

An Example of Exaggerating Witchcraft and Illnesses Told by Alex

Alex Morales is the youngest culturally conservative leader in Veracruz and a former president of la Directiva. He had a short-lived presidency and a stormy relationship with the village Catholic friar who brought him to an ephemeral experience of power as community president. At the time of the interview in 2002, Alex was 24 year-old, single person studying law in a Rivas university. As I described in chapter 2, Alex was the first Indigenous leader I contacted during fieldwork. In the fallowing two testimonies, Alex shares his views and experiences with witchcraft and how it is often overused to wrongly justify just about any misfortune in Veracruz. He also speaks about issues of envy in the community and need to protect oneself from the evil powers of witchcraft.

Yes, I've gone to see Indigenous and mestizo healers to be treated for witchcraft several times. However, I only go to see a healer when a serious illness or misfortune afflicts me. I don't believe that every time one is sick it's due to witchcraft, but I know there are people in the community who believe that. Let me tell you the story of a case I personally know.

More or less three years ago, there was an old woman in the village who died from a brain hemorrhage. Her name was Rufina. She was a nice woman, but her family was really gullible about witchcraft. They took even a minor fever as the work of witchcraft. For this family, everything was a curse. They truly exaggerated things. For instance, even an infected mosquito bite was immediately assumed to be the result of some one casting a spell on them. They immediately feared that maggots would start eating their flesh out because of a simple mosquito bite. The point is that they believed so much in witchcraft that any minor complaint was thought to be a curse. Rufina was a sweet, pleasant ninety-year old woman who never quarreled with anybody in the village. She was a very hard-working woman. To make a living, she used to sell tortillas and *other goodies, even on Sundays. Naturally, due to her very advanced age, Rufina was gradually becoming very weak and physically unstable. She would lie down, get up and get tired, just like any old person does. Unfortunately, Rufina had three horrible and unkind daughters. They were sometimes unkind and would treat her badly.*

One day, Rufina was eating a nacatama [a corn and pork based dish], *and because it was very big and heavy, it fell off the plate. One of these horrible daughters reprimanded Rufina so hideously for having dropped the nacatamal and insulted her so obscenely that the old woman was really devastated and upset. As a result, she suffered a brain hemorrhage. Her daughters didn't take her to the hospital; they simply said the incident was due to a curse sent to the family by a woman named Margot. They insisted that Margot was to blame because she didn't talk to them at all. The lack of communication was taken as indifference, and her indifference as an indication of evil intentions towards the family. They thought, "if she doesn't talk to us, she must hate us." Members of both the Evangelical and Catholic Churches came to their house to try to convince them that the Rufina had died a natural death, rather than one due to witchcraft. Rufina's daughters were so stubborn that there was no way of convincing them otherwise. They unfairly blamed a presumed enemy of the family, a woman who didn't speak to them, but who was a good friend of Rufina. Like most of us here, they were even kin ties. Rufina died. Her death was, if not directly brought, at least precipitated, by her own ungrateful daughters. However, it was Margot who had to live with the stigma of being a witch and of having killed her friend.*

This is just one of the many cases of people being unfairly accused of witchcraft in the community. Like this case, you will hear of many others. Sometimes, people *irresponsibly say "so and so killed my mother or so and so killed my sister, and so on and so forth", but maybe they died from natural causes. Now, how do we know when an accusation is true? Let me tell you, it all depends. For instance if someone says that a person known for being unkind and mean casts a curse on someone else, people immediately believe it. Difficult people are the first and most believable candidates for witchcraft accusations. Even in cases in which the accused is not guilty, people still believe she or he is guilty because that accusation confirms their opinions about difficult individuals. In this town, we all know who goes and who doesn't go to visit brujos. I tell you, that at least eight of every ten people have, at one point in their life, gone to see one. I have.*

Alex Talks about Envy, Witchcraft and Protection

In this village, envy is abundant and reigns supreme. That's why we go to see healers. We need to protect ourselves. Health is so precious and illness so despised that it's what makes us vulnerable. If people cannot harm you directly, they will attack your health by making you sick. Sometimes for good reasons, such as fair retaliation, but often simply driven out of envy. Let me give you an example of how envious people behave in this community so maybe you understand better. For instance, if I buy my wife a new pair of shoes or some pants, some envious people will do anything to have the same or a better pair than what my wife has. In addition, they'll tell my wife "those shoes look ugly on you; they don't suit you." They say that and offend her precisely because they like her shoes. If, for instance, you start making home improvements, you are inviting envy. Here, many people start improving their houses, but they never even get half of the *job done. If,* *let's say, I start working on my house, that means I'm doing well. I have good health. But, that's my vulnerability. I may also be a target of envy and people can send me an ill wind so that I can't improve my house. When you're healthy, it means you can get sick anytime. Envious people do everything they can, including visiting a brujo to curse you, so that you spend your money visiting several curanderos to get healed and not on improving your home. Envious people can't stand other people having a better house than they do. A lot of the time, envy is just gratuitous. Thus, the only way to protect oneself, is to get a contra [an amulet that repels curses]. In fact, most people in Veracruz have a contra. That is the only way to be safe. Even high-ranking politicians, and other important and public figures in Nicaragua, carry a contra with them. Alexis Arguello, the famous lightweight boxing world champion, is known to carry a contra with him. Misfortune happens or can be made to happen. That's why one must always be protected.*

Witchcraft, Magic, Healing and Illness accordignt to Cipriano Martínez

In this section, Cipriano Martínez, an influential leader and healer in the community provides detailed information about his personal experiences as a curandero who admits to the practice of medicinal witchcraft only with the purpose of serving the community in good faith. In the following nine testimonies, Cipriano Martinez further illustrates and conceptualizes the social and ontological nature of medical witchcraft in Veracruz.

1. I Cipriano Martínez

My name is Cipriano Martínez and I'm a curandero because I provide a medical service to the people within and around my Indigenous community. In Nicaragua, people commonly call us brujos (witches), but I like to be called a curandero (literally, "the one who cures"). Some people think I'm a good curandero. I don't know, but my medical reputation is such that people from all over Nicaragua, and even Costa Rica, have come seeking my help. I've successfully cured people who'd been diagnosed with terminal illnesses. I try to help the community by charging very low fees and by giving away free medicines. Unfortunately, members of the local Evangelical church claim that I cure people with satanic power. That's simply not true. It's not my ability to heal that heals. It's the healing power of God that ultimately brings full recovery to my patients. In fact, no one gets better without faith in God. Faith is a necessary ingredient for healing and for getting better. Faith manifests itself in different ways. For instance, many patients tell me that the mere fact of knowing that they will be seen by a healer already has a healing impact on them. I think that the efficacy of our Indigenous medicine must to be the work of faith because I'm not an educated person with complex medical knowledge. All I know is ancestral Indigenous knowledge. [Biomedical] *physicians do not cure many of the illnesses that afflict our people in the Indigenous community because* [biomedical] *physicians do not understand Indigenous sicknesses, such as empacho, quebranto, susto, or mal aire. I carry out my own diagnosis according to tradition and understand what* *my patients are suffering from and give them the proper medicaments because I know what those illnesses are.*

I began learning how to heal with my grandfather, Juan Esteban Martinez. As a child, I used to watch my grandfather treat many patients. People used to call Juan Esteban a true curandero/brujo (witch/healer). Although I was very small, I was able to observe my grandfather perform his healing rituals and practices while helping him prepare some medicines. My grandfather died when I was still a small boy. He used to live in a huge house, but had a separate hut to treat his patients. I remember he was well known for having a Catholic wooden statue people called "Jesús de la buena esperanza" (Jesus of the Good Hope). Large crows seeking to be healed would come from all over the region to be healed by Juan Esteban. I learned the secrets of healing because I think it runs in the family. Now my 20 year-old granddaughter wants to be a healer. Let me now tell you how my Indigenous medicine works.

2. Diagnostic Oracle

I tell my patient, "look here, I take this card deck, now I'm going to leave it on the table." Then, I'll call the numbers such and such, and if the number I predicted doesn't pop up, it means that someone has performed a mal aire or harm on you. Someone has cast a zanganada (wicked spell) in your home by sprinkling bewitched water. That is why you can't see the card clearly. Someone has cast un mal puesto (a spell) on you; that explains all the domestic quarrels you are having. Then, I tell my patient, take 21 lemons, prepare them in a certain manner and make a cross out of salt mixed with ashes. Then, take that mixture and place it in the entrance of your home, while you say aloud the *following prayer: "I dissolve the spell in the name of Jesus of Nazareth". You'll see, people in your home will be very happy again.*

3. A Story about one of my Patients

A *month ago, Juan's wife came from Costa Rica and died. She had been sick for a long time. Juan came to her funeral. Now he's sick too. His mother came to see me, and judging from what she was telling me, Juan was probably sick due to one of the following reasons. Number one, he was given a bewitched drink of alcohol mixed with some medicine he took, or number two, he probably brushed his teeth with his deceased wife's toothbrush. Sent by his mother, Juan came to see me. I examined him and realized he had been bewitched in Costa Rica. He was cursed at his workplace, so that his wife would die. But now he's also dying. He's suffering from the same illness as his wife was. If he is not treated, he may also die soon. I don't work on Thursdays because that's the day of the Holiness of Christ, but I made an exception because they are poor people. When I told Juan and his mother what the problem was, I also said, "this is not a laughing matter. These four black cards clearly tell us what's going on. I see more mourning, death. So, you'd better do something now. I gave them some oil that you cannot find here in Nicaragua. "You take a bottle," I told them and gave them one. "How much is it?" they asked me. "It's 45 córdobas," I told them. It's from Costa Rica. You can't really find it here. "We don't have any money with us right now," they said. "Take it now, and you can pay me later," I told them. "We'll see what we can do to save your son", I said. "Take the oil with you, so that if I don't cure him, someone else can. I'm not greedy. Medicine belongs to all of us.*

4. How I lost one of my Children

Before I became the healer I am now, I sought the help of other healers who taught me a great deal of what I know. I particularly remember Blanca Quintanilla. Many years ago, someone poisoned my fifth son when he was doing his military service. I remembered he came home very sick from Orosí. We took him to the hospital. He stayed there for about 19 days. Then the hospital told us to take him home because he was going to die. Then we took him to see an Indigenous healer. Her name was Blanca Quintanilla. When she saw my son, she told me, "No, no, no, you'd better get ready for a funeral because you son is totally destroyed. Unfortunately he is going to die between 8:00 and 8:30 p.m.," she told us. That was exactly what happened. My son died at the time she told us he would.

Earlier a priest had come to touch him and told us that my son was going to die around the same time the healer had told us. "We will celebrate a mass for the eternal rest of his soul," the priest told me. "All right," I said. My son died at 8:15 p.m.

The healer told me there was nothing she could have done to save him. "There is no time left to apply any medicine. Don't worry, I won't charge you. Why should I? It's difficult for you as it is", Blanca told me. After that, my desire to become a better healer increased. Blanca and I became close friends and she taught me a lot about Indigenous medicine. I don't know if it was a case of "late evil". If an illness has no cure, it's because the person who sent the illness has died. For example, if I sent an illness to a person today and I die, there is no way that person can be cured. That is to say, if the person who sends the illness dies, that's the end of the story. The illness is then lethal. The victim inevitably dies, too. Thus, I would not be able to know who sent the illness *because I work with this spirit* [pointing at a photograph on his little desk of a dead physician called of El Moreno Cañas]. *I can only do what the spirit commands me to do. For example, he commands me. "You will do this for such and such person," I do it.*

5. How Evil Winds are Cast

An evil wind can be cast in different ways. I'm going to tell you only about a few of them. For example, sometimes people use a glass full of soil from a cemetery and a glass full of snake powder[32]*. They mix them and spread them around your house, so that misfortune will come to the home. If they are building or improving a house, they won't be able to finish. Spreading this dust also makes members of a family fight amongst themselves all the time. It brings disharmony to a household. For example, if you and your wife fight all the time, it's because someone has spread some of this dust on your doorstep.*

Other times a person may choose a tree and for the next 30 days, he will hit it with a machete. On the 30th day tree must fall. This will cause harm or death to the enemy for whom the evil is intended. Another way to cast a spell on a person is by putting in a drink, ashes from the long hair-like beards that male turkeys have on their chests. One must take three hairs and burn them. The victim will get very sick and may die from a liver sickness

An effective way of causing a person to have a headache and other pains is by the power of suggestion-prayers. One reads these prayers and says the name of the person one wants to harm. You can find these prayers in the book of Saint Cipriano. You see,

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[32] Snake powder is prepared by drying its flesh and grinding it until a fine powder is obtained.

those prayers are to do harm. I don't use any of that stuff. I'm telling you because you seem interested in understanding and knowing about these things. I don't think using those prayers is recommendable because if one believes in God one must not use any of that stuff. How could I harm you or my neighbour? Neighbours, you know, are the first people to come to see you when you're sick. Regardless, people have tried to harm me so many times, even my own neighbours. Thank God, they've not been successful in harming me. Here, near a near by comarca, there is a woman who publicly admits she has tried to harm me. She's already sold seven cows to get the money to harm me and she's not been able to. She told a friend of mine here in Veracruz. "Look, I've sold seven cows so that I can see Cipriano crawling like a snake. I'm going to sell one more. But that'll be the last one," she told my friend.

As I was telling you, to ruin a business you take three colour ribbons and tie them in this fashion [Cipriano Martínez made an elaborate knot]. *That is called liga y banda (league and band). This will make any business fail. The owner of the business won't even realize when everything is absolutely gone. He will behave as if everything is fine. But it's not. If you want your partner, wife or husband to leave, you put an entierro* [burial] *in your backyard. You put it so that your partner leaves, dies or goes completely crazy. It's unfair because often you've gotten where you are because of your partner and you can't just kiss them good-bye like that. But it actually happens. I think that before the eyes of God none of these brings any success. It's not good at all. I know about some of these ways of casting evil winds because I studied it, but I don't use any of this stuff I've just told you. When people come to see me asking me to cast spells, I tell them that we are* *all brothers and should therefore love one another like God commands us to do. I tell them not to be envious of others and that we must work harder to improve our lives.*

6. No Just Anyone Can Cast a Spell

Not anybody can cast a spell. To cast a spell, people go to see curanderos. People around here say, "If I can' cast a spell, my money can." People pay for witchcraft. Brujos don't fear God. But, should I stain my soul just to make a couple of bucks? I don't think so, not me. Money goes away and one stays marked forever before God for doing harm to a fellow human. Only God knows if the person you are trying to harm has even enough to eat or to feed his own children. If you make a person sick, that person won't be able to work and, therefore, feed his family. Furthermore, the family must spend even more money to heal the sick person. People say things like, "they don't like me because I have a good job, because I'm prospering materially, because I have a good woman, or husband," and so on and so forth. Sometimes people cast spells when they are not even motivated by vengeance, which is the most common cause. They just do it for envy and hatred. For example, if people see me working and prospering in my business. They don't want to see me working. People have tried putting burials and other spells on me. But I've treated myself. To know what the matter is, I put seven candles of different colours. If one candle does not burn all the way, that means that there is some dirt in my house, witchcraft, I mean by dirt. If you want to know if you have been cast a spell at home you must take seven candles and put them in a triangle. If all of them burn, then there is not dirt at your place.

7. How I Help my Patients

When people are victims of a robbery, they also come to see me. The other day a woman who had a cow stolen came to see me. The cow was stolen here in Boca de Brito. I told the woman that her cow could be found in a hacienda whose owner is Carmelo Pastora. They found it. The woman went to the hacienda and found her cow. Then she came back and gave me some money. Another person came to see me because she was either sick through a prayer of suggestion or someone had spread evil dust in her house. The persons who cast the spell or the illness, does it in complete secrecy. It goes more or less like this, "I invoke this prayer in the name of such and such person, I take some salt, a piece of black thread and some other things."

There was a non-Indigenous healer, in San Jorge, who'd cast the spells himself to make people sick, and then he would charge a lot of money to treat the same people he had made sick. Eventually, he lost his ability to walk and died. Before the eyes of God, that's a sin. We're all sinners. That's why we shouldn't commit more sins.

In addition, one must consider the risk of running into a mischievous spirit. Certain mischievous spirits make fun of us and can trick us. These mischievous spirits take over a person and make the person mad, crazy. There is one person here in la comarca Pedernal who sees this kind of spirits who come to tease her. The spirit shows up at the house of the person they are controlling at any time. Then they run away. The women spirits she sees are from Costa Rica. They are the ones who killed his wife. These women spirits did not want to leave the poor man alone. The man lives afflicted by the hunting spirits. He cries a lot, is unable to eat and sleep properly. That's why I'm telling *you that he's now suffering from the suggestion prayer. Only he can see those spirits because they are not really there.*

There was another woman who came to see me because she would hear voices. She had gone to the Rivas hospital and the medical doctor found nothing wrong with her. Why do you think they did not find what was wrong? I tell you. That's because they didn't understand where the illness is; it's an evil wind. Why can't they find the illness? They usually give medicine for what they think it's the illness not for what it really is. This is so, because medical doctors know how to treat only common illnesses. Our Indigenous knowledge cures evil and spiritual illnesses. We know when a person has been bewitched and know what to do, medically. We know what herbs and roots to use. Medical doctors are trained to understand pharmaceutical things. They must go to a pharmacy. I tell my patients that there is a remedy for each illness.

First, I take my deck of cards and I tell what to do. For example, I say, "touch these cards over here, cut the card there, and take this one card over here, and so on and so forth. The cards tell me what's wrong with the person. Then, once I know what's wrong, I prepare the medicine. Sometimes all the medicine looks the same. That is to say, I may give a green liquid to two patients who have different illnesses because the colour may be the same. But the healing ingredients are different. I can also give a yellow medicine to three different patients suffering from different illnesses because, although the medicine is the same colour, the healing formula is different. The colour of the medicine is determined by the type of root or herb I use. I see how in the Rivas Hospital a patient is given a hand-full of pink pills. There comes another patient with a different *illness and still gets a hand-full of pink pills as well. As if both were suffering from the same illness.*

Sometimes I realize that a person has been bewitched by examining a urine sample. I put some alcohol in it and I can tell. You bring me a urine sample, and I tell you so and so are trying to harm you, in this way or that way. Then, I treat them with several herbs and roots. But if it's a common illness such as sickness of the liver, then I give them other herbs. I usually don't tell people who are the persons responsible for casting the spell and making them sick. Telling them is initiating a war among them. I just cure people. However, there are those who want to know who made them sick, claiming that they have a right to know. I ask them, "if you have not seen, how can you know?" Then, they answer, "I suspect someone." "Well, that's just your suspicion," I reply. Sometimes people unfairly accuse others of witchcraft. I think that in order to know who cast the spell, one must have convincing evidence.

8. I have been Falsely Accused of Witchcraft

However, some curanderos tell their patients, "so and so is responsible for your sickness or misfortune". To give you an example, there's a healer who's not an Indigenous person who always tells people who made them sick. Her name is Abelina Canjura. There was a case of a man who had three medical exams in Managua. He was told that if he continues drinking, he was going to die. His liver was severely damaged. Then, someone told him to go and see Abelina Canjura. Instead, his relatives went to her place. There, she told them, "I can go and see him at his place, but my trip will cost you 500 córdobas, plus transportation." They paid the money. When she saw the patient, she *told his mother, "your son has been bewitched by a relative." The next morning, the mother of the patient came to see me and asked me to lend her 100 córdobas. "I need to buy some good food for my son who is very sick," she told me. "Here," I said, and gave her the money because she is my aunt, and the sick man, my cousin and compadre* [co-father]. *His is the godfather of all my children and I'm the godfather of all his children. The following day, my aunt came again and said to me, "Oh, how much do I owe you for having lent me the money?" Then, I said to her, "I won't charge you for loaning you the money. I lent you the money so that you could pay me whenever you can." "No", she said. "You're ungrateful. You've made my son sick. You've bewitched him," she shouted at me. "Excuse me, aunt?" I said. "Because of you, my son is very sick", she shouted me. "Who told you that?" I asked, very upset. "A woman who came to see my son to heal him told us so," she replied. "What's her name?" I demanded. "I'd tell you, but you're such a trouble maker that it's better if I don't. You're my nephew and I wouldn't want to see you in the situation my son is." "You'd better tell me or else you are going to jail for defamation," I threatened. She eventually told that a woman healer from San Jorge had said that. "What about the medical exams from Managua, don't they mean anything to you?" I asked her. "Of course they do," she said. "Don't you get it?", she asked with irony. The healer was going to charge her 7,000 córdobas*[33]*. I sued the healers for defamation and my aunt sued her for fraud. I told the judge about how insane the idea was that I would want to harm the godfather of all my children. Although she denied all charges, she ended up in jail. Abelina alleged that perhaps my aunt misunderstood what*

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[33] Many people in Veracruz go into debt due to the exorbitant amounts of money they sometimes pay to mestizo healers.

she had said. On her third day in jail, Abelina was sick with a facial paralysis. For sure, her facial paralysis was a divine punishment. She was dishonouring me. After some time in jail, she also suffered a brain hemorrhage and went crazy. Eventually, after serving part of the sentence, she was released.

No one has ever accused me of fraud. I've never charged more than what people can pay me to treat them. My aunt is now so convinced of my innocence that she is closer to me. They all had never been so close to me. People from that side of my family are troublemakers. They come here to the bar I run on the weekend, get drunk and cause trouble.

9. How I Treat Cancer

There was a man who was to have surgery. His family came and asked for my opinion. "We have been told by the medical doctor that if he doesn't undergo surgery, he will die," one of his sisters said to me. "No way! Don't waste your money. What those medical doctors want, is to be able to practice on patients like your brother," I told them. "Do you think you could cure him, then?" they asked me. "Yes," I replied. The problem was getting him out of the hospital. They went back to the hospital and managed to get him out. They brought him here. "What's wrong with him?" they asked me. He has an imposed cancer. Someone has sent him this illness through witchcraft. I treated him without undergoing surgery, now the man is healthy again. Imposed cancers are common around here. People cry from the horrible pains it causes. I treated him with herbs and a pigeon. Moncho Pastrana is his name. He can tell you the truth about how I cured him.

He was brought to me almost dying. According to the hospital, he was a terminally ill patient.

His family bought some of the medication to me, and a pigeon. Then, I went to his house. As soon as I came into the room, I perceived a fetid smell. I smelled death. They knew he could die any moment. His sister started to cry. "Don't cry," I said to her. "Give me the pigeon and the herbs and bring two children to help me," I told them. In half an hour, you'll see him start moving. "Soon he'll be asking for water," I said. In fact, he spoke and asked for water. "Don't give him water. Give him juice, instead. One of those that come in cans," I told them. He soon opened his eyes. He didn't know where he was. He was disoriented. Then, he asked for food. "We are so poor that we don't have any more food," they said. "Don't worry. I'll get him some food." In three days, the man was a lot better. During the healing ritual, some feathers had to be plucked out of the bird. After the feathers of the bird [pigeon] have cleaned the ill body of the person, the feathers must be burned. Then the ashes are buried in the middle of the doorstep so that it protects the house and its inhabitants from evil winds and other illnesses. Upon finishing the healing session, the bird is to be released and flies to the place where the illness is coming from. Because the illness of this man came through a spirit, and the pigeon is a spirit, the bird will tell us who did it. The bird may fly for a while but it will land and enter the house where the sickness is coming from. "Pay attention," I said. I released the bird. It flew for a little while, then landed and started to walk. The bird entered at the seventh house. That meant the person who cast the spell is from that house. "Now you know," I said. I didn't tell them. The bird did. "But, don't do anything about it. Leave it to God," I said. Go and talk to Moncho. He can tell you how sick he was, and how I *revived him. He's around my age. When he sees me, he tells me, "Thank God and you that I'm alive. I was a dead man. You healed me. Thank you."*

Discussion

What Lévis-Strauss (1963) described more than 40 years ago about the realism people find in witchcraft, still describes the realism of witchcraft in Veracruz. Lévis-Strauss (1963) argues that people who are aware that they the subject of witchcraft or sorcery are thoroughly convinced that they are doomed according to the most solemn traditions of their group. Friends, relatives and anyone else around the bewitched share this certainty. The community's system of reference becomes indicative of the undeniable realism of social and psychological existence of a reality called witchcraft. Witchcraft in Veracruz is an essential part of a medical discourse, a social practice and ontological mechanism for "fabulation" (Lévis-Strauss 1963) of an unknown reality. That realism does not exist in a social and historical vacuum; but it is rather inserted and dependent of the emotions evoked by perceptions of common ancestry, which determined their present as the historical result of common ethnic experience.

The Ethnographic Testimonies of Three Healers

The following testimonies help me demonstrate how, beyond its immediate medical benefits and functions, Indigenous medicine also functions as a marker of ethnic identity for Veracruceños. I have chosen to present them in this way, as opposed to inserting only segments of the interviews in the text for three reasons: first, by presenting long testimonies, I further enhance and acknowledge the intellectual contribution of my cultural informants to this dissertation; and second, it is an attempt to present the Veracruceños' point of view about their own cultural reality in an as "thick as possible" manner. In this way, the complexities and simplicities of the Veracruceño social life and culture can be appreciated from a closer angle. Third, long testimonies constitute the flesh and bones of this dissertation. My understanding, interpretations, and conclusion of this study are based, precisely, on the numerous interviews I carried out during fieldwork. In the end, however, these testimonies only represent segments of the totality of testimonies I collected. The ones I present here are representative of the general and most common ideas that sustain my argument about Indigenous medicine and ethnic identity. Throughout these testimonies, Veracruceños, as social agents, demonstrate the ways in which medical practices and ideas are shaped by, and reflect notions of ethnic identity. The narratives I present here are from healers Felipe Urrútia, Agustina Pavón and Rafaela Carbonero. I give no further detail about them since they have already been introduced earlier in this chapter. The testimonies are followed by a brief discussion that links them to the central argument of this dissertation.

Testimony of Felipe: *El Sobador* (The Bone Setter)

My name is Felipe Urrútia. I'm an Indigenous sobador (bonesetter). I set bones and treat muscular pain the Indigenous way. My knowledge is ancestral knowledge. That's how I learned it and this is how we Indigenous people do things. My grandfather, Apolinario Urrútia, taught me how to set bones by massaging. I used to watch him setting people's bones at home. When he saw my interest, he started to patiently teach me.

While working, he would say to me, "look at this rib... when a fracture occurs, this is what you do... look at this bone here, this is how you put it back in place. You must pull it this way and it will fall into place like this," Every time a healing session would start, he would always take the time to explain to me what he was doing and what the problem was. I was fourteen then. "Look ... pay attention," he used to tell me. "One day you will take my place, son," he'd say in a humble sort of way. We were several siblings in my family, but my grandfather said that only I had el don de curar [the gift of healing].

Unfortunately, one day he lost his don de curar because he broke a mystical rule. Indigenous healing has rules that one must follow. Regrettably, he decided to massage an animal after massaging a person. One must never treat animals if one is treating humans, and vice versa. "If you massage humans, you can never massage animals; and if you massage animals you can never treat people. You cannot and should not mix the two. You must make up your mind what you are going to treat, animals or people," my grandfather told me once. Massaging people and then animals is the biggest mistake one can ever make as a sobador. It isn't good to first massage animals and then humans. "Son, if you ever massage an animal, don't you ever try to massage a human again," he pronounced, "because that is a grave mistake. It isn't allowed," he insisted. My grandfather did it because one of the animals he owned broke a leg. After that, my grandfather was only able to set the bones of sick animals. He also taught me many important healing secrets. For example, he told me that washing your hands after performing a massage is very dangerous because they can get very stiff. That's why I only massage people at nighttime, because during the day I may forget and wash my hands. Really, massaging a person requires great strength. The hands accumulate heat.

So, that's why I never wash my hands immediately after massaging. It would ruin my hands.

Because I followed my grandfather's advice, I have been able to treat many people here in the village, including members of my own family. Take a look at my son's arm, for example, [Felipe grabbed his son's arm]. *Inside his right arm, he has some platinum that the doctor inserted at the hospital. The doctor* [physician] *said that my son had to undergo surgery again in order to get his bones totally fixed. However, in the end, it wasn't necessary because I healed my son myself, and like my son, I've healed many people in this community. They all come to me when they think they've fractured a bone or have muscle and tendon problems.*

This is how I heal broken bones. First, I use beef lard as a base for the massage. That's really good. It's got powerful curative virtues. I heat it up and once it's warm enough, I apply it on the affected area, and start rubbing it on. Gradually, heat starts to build up. Then I start pulling and feeling the bones around and trying to put them into place. Sometimes, it's not a problem of dislocated bones. However, people usually come to see me and tell me, "Look, I broke my arm," but often it's not that the arm is broken. It's just the tendons or muscles that are damaged. In those cases, I have to be careful not to damage healthy ones. Finger by finger, I explore the whole arm to see what's wrong with the person, until I can pin point the problem. Sometimes people fall, parts of their body swell, and they come with bruises thinking it is a broken limb. In those cases, I give them the following remedy: I take around ten inches of the bark of a mango tree. Then, boil it in a liter of water and add a little bit of salt, what you can get with three fingers. When you cut the bark you have to make sure, you cut it from a part of the tree facing the *morning sun. Once it's boiled, you wait a while until the heat is bearable, apply it on plaster, and the bones will gradually heal. When I can get it, I also use Suelda con sualda*[34] *(Anredera vesicaria), a very effective healing plant for setting bones. You must repeat the treatment for several days, until you see the bones are healing. If it's a grave fracture, I apply this treatment for two days in a row or just every other day, until it heals. Here in my garden, as you can see, we have plenty of medicinal plants. We have a tree named Quelite Fraile (Cnidoscolus aconitifolius), which I also use to treat bones and muscle problems. I prepare a special paste with it and apply it on the affected area. It does miracles on broken bones. I apply it with a massage every other day until the bones heal. In some cases, if I see that even though I've been gradually massaging, the bones are still out of place, I tell the person to come again the next evening for more treatment. These plants are the best anti-inflammatory I know.*

Felipe's Testimony on Communal Medicine

You see, here in the community, medicine belongs to all of us. I don't even charge people for my service. Some people, however, are grateful and offer me gifts, but that's out of their own generosity. I don't charge a single penny. Do you know how much it costs in Rivas to go see a sobador? In Rivas, there is a man named Lencho Coréa, who charges 30 Córdobas (around $1.70 U.S.) per session; and he's not as gentle as we are

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[34] The Spanish Chronicler Oviedo (1965:67) describes how aborigines in the Americas would use the *jaruma* leaves of a certain plant to heal fractured bones. "Soaked leafs of a certain plant were applied to the fractured bones as plaster" (Ibid). This plaster would form an adhesive cast, which could only be removed several days after it was applied. By the time the cast was removed, the fracture was completely healed. "It did not matter how badly broken the bones were; after fifteen days this medication would leave the bones as good as before" (1965:67). Oviedo gave testimony of the effectiveness of this procedure based on the many cases, which he witnessed.

here. He doesn't allow the bones to warm up. He tricks his patients by suddenly telling them, "Hey, look over there!" While you look, crack! He quickly puts the bone back into position. Our Indigenous way, grandfather taught me, is to first warm up the area one is treating. I'm now trying to teach my children how to heal because it's our way of preserving our culture and identity, and our things. My wife also knows how to treat other illnesses. One day a woman came to me and said, "Felipe! I broke my leg." "No, Ma'am," I said, "this isn't a broken bone. This is just an injured tendon," I added, and started massaging her and fixed it. That's how I work because that's how we do things here in our Indigenous community. That's how we've always done it. That's how I do it.

Testimony of Agustina Pavón

My name is Agustina Pavón. I'm Indigenous woman from Veracruz del Zapotal. For many years, around 50, I've been healing lots of illnesses in the community, but I don't know for how long I have been a midwife. I only remember that I started working as a midwife when I was still a very young woman. Now I'm almost 90 years old, and I still assist at births when people call me. Those who look for my services know that I'm still a competent midwife, although I've been blind for a long time, around 30 years or so. Thank God, to tell you the truth, I've never had a regrettable experience as a midwife. No child or mother has ever died while I've been assisting a birth. Oh dear, I don't remember how many births I've attended or how many years I've worked as a midwife. It's hard to keep track, but I can tell you that many of the little girls I helped deliver are already grandmothers themselves. I've even assisted my own granddaughter's as they have given birth.

We all do things here the same way. Now I will tell you what we do in a delivery. As soon as I arrive at the house where the birth will take place, I immediately prepare a drink with Quelite (Cnidoscolus aconitifolius) leaves mixed with guanaba (Annona muricata) leaves and cinnamon. I gently tap the abdomen, searching for signs, while I encourage the mother to be strong and deliver the baby. When the mother is ready to deliver, I help her into a squatting position. Then the baby starts to come out. I take it. The baby cries! The mother asks me how the baby is. I tell her that everything is fine. Once the baby is out, I cut the umbilical chord with a razor blade. Then I tie the umbilical chord with a string and put some camphor on it. Then I burn part of the umbilical chord with the flame from a special candle. Then the baby is bathed with warm chamomile water. Then a piece of clean cloth is used to tightly wrap the baby, especially around the belly. The placenta is burned on coals and buried in the backyard of the house. We usually soak it in alcohol before burning it.

From the day the mother gives birth, we give her a special drink called bebedizo (a medicinal beverage). We prepare that drink for new and old mothers. The ingredients are honey, rum, rosemary, aluzema, pimienta de castilla, culantro, and heneldo. All of these ingredients are ground and then mixed with more rum. For the next forty days after giving birth, the mother must wear a corset and drink the bebedizo for at least ten days after giving birth.

As you can see, I'm a blind woman. I don't see a thing [She them showed me her scalded eyes. Perhaps due to my sometimes high pitch voice in Spanish, for about a week she thought I was a woman; however, I told her I was a man]. *Oh, my beautiful lady, only once in a while I see shadows and light. Nevertheless, I'm quite capable of helping* *deliver babies. I became a midwife by watching others do their job. There are no medical secrets here. We all learn what we want if we happen to like it, of course. I'm particularly thankful to a woman named Paula López. I remember that many years ago I happened to be in a house where a woman was in labour. Paula, who was assisting the birth, called me and asked me to help her. In those days, there weren't too many midwives, and there was no hospital either, like nowadays. I've always liked to help other people you see, so I went. "Here, cut this over here," she said referring to the child's umbilical cord. Then she gave me more instructions. "Here," she said, "put some of this ointment on it (the umbilical cord), burn the end on that candle, so that it won't bleed. Put some camphor ointment on the umbilical cord. Wrap it so that it's protected," she instructed me during the delivery. She used to teach me a lot of stuff. I did everything as she told me. From then on, she would always call me to assist her during many births. Eventually, I gained enough knowledge that I started doing it by myself. I remember she told me that only some women have el don to be midwives, and that I was one of them*

Do you see those two little girls over there? (She said while pointing at them), I helped in their births. But you know there is so much one must know about births. There are so many things that mothers must know about taking care of their bodies. It's not like you just give birth and everything is immediately back to normal. There's more to it. For example, mothers must be careful after giving birth so that they don't get sick with entuerto [chronic postpartum abdominal pain]. *Failure to follow a special diet and hard labour work after giving birth can cause entuerto. For example, right after giving birth, a woman must avoid certain foods and physical activities and take the following precautions. The first thing a woman must do after giving birth is to start drinking the* *bebedizo. This is a specially prepared drink so it gives a boost to women who have just given birth. I already told you how we make it. In addition to the bebedizo, mothers must follow a special diet. This diet includes: pinol (a corn-based powder mixed with water), honey, toasted bread, roasted cheese, but also smoked or fried, chamomile, and honey to clean the uterus. To complement the diet, women should also have [ideally] hot chocolate, grilled beef with plenty of black pepper, beans, eggs, and lemon to keep blood from getting watery, for at least a month. During the first 40 days, the woman must avoid sexual relations and wind gusts. Cold foods must be avoided to prevent having a cold womb. Bath or showers cannot be taken until the 8th or 10th day after giving birth. Only the face and other areas can be washed with rosemary water. Head and ears must be covered to keep air from entering the body. No laundry, sweeping, or any other domestic tasks can be performed during the first 40 days. Almond oil must be applied on the face to avoid bad skin pigmentation. A tight band must be worn around the waist for about 40 days. Not complying with these strict food avoidances and activities can cause other complications like cervical hemorrhaging, which can cause anemia, and even cancer. Some young mothers are now disobeying these rules by taking showers the next day after giving birth and refusing to drink the bebedizo. They say that they're modern. I think they're crazy. The way we do things here in the community has helped us preserve ourselves, healthy and safe. Why should we change things, or abandon what we have? If the new generations abandon our traditions, what will we have left?*

In addition to being a midwife, I am also a curandera who treats mainly children's illnesses. For example, the most common problems I treat are Calor de Vista [literally, heat from a gaze or eyesight], *empacho, susto, (fright), fallen fontanel, worms* *and parasites, headaches, ear aches, toothaches, and indigestion. Almost daily, I heal children in our community. "Don't be a dummy. Don't you see that with this medication you'll get better?" That's what I tell some of the kids who don't want to take the medicine. When I get reluctant patients, I tell them that the parasites in their stomach will become big snakes and eat them from the inside out if they don't take the medication. It always works* [she said while gently laughing]. *They even ask for more right away. Frightening them always makes them comply. Then I just give some instructions to the mother about what they need to do next, and then they leave. I don't charge. People give me money in gratitude for my time and care, but not really for the medical service. God gave me this gift, so why should I charge people for something I got for free? Now, if you go to see a healer in Rivas, there you will get charged a lot of money. Some of them even advertise themselves as Indigenous healers, but they are not. They just want to make some money out of people's needs; we don't. Instead, here we help each other. Many people prefer to come see me or to see other healers in the village because at the clínica* [biomedical government post] *the doctores do not understand our illnesses. They say it is nonsense... perhaps it is nonsense for them because they don't understand our medicine, or don't want to understand. What matters is that, for us, our medicine isn't nonsense; otherwise, we would be dead by now. Right?*

The Testimony of Rafaela Carbonero: a Midwife/Herbalist

My name is Rafaela Carbonero. In a way, I'm an Indigenous healer because, for about forty years, people from and outside the village have come to see me when they are sick. People from around the outside the village identify me as an Indigenous healer *because that is what I am. As well, I've been a midwife for more than thirty-five years. All of the people I've treated have been successfully cured because they have had faith in both God and in my healing ability. I treat adults and children. The most common illnesses for children are calor de vista, (gaze heat or evil eye) empacho (indigestion), fallen fontanel, worms and parasites, susto (fright), headaches, earaches, toothaches, and indigestion. Most adults come seeking remedies for empacho, headaches, toothaches, and back pains. Bonesetters in the village treat other maladies, such as bone fractures and dislocations, as well as ligament and tendon problems. Then, I send them there.*

I know when a child is sick with calor de vista because I examine them and look for the usual signs, such as cold hands and feet and a warm chest, among other signs. I bathe them with boiled water from chile congo leaves. Then, I give them a pill (acetaminophen) and apply some camphor for three days. The water must be as hot as they can stand it. After that, they are put to bed. Calor de vista is fatal. Children die or grow up sickly when not properly treated. Children get sick by having contact with someone's vista fuerte (strong gaze or eyesight). If a person gazes at a child, it gets sick. They cry and can't be consoled.

I'll tell you a personal story about a case of calor de vista. Lencho is known in the village for having vista fuerte [strong eyesight or gaze]. *One day he was coming down the street. My granddaughter Lorena, wanted to know if it was true that Lencho had vista fuerte. So, rather than going inside the house to avoid his strong gaze, Lorena stayed on the street, playing on the sidewalk with her one-year-old daughter Maylin. Lencho passed by and greeted them both. The same night, Maylin was very sick with high fever. Lorena wanted to prove that what I had told her about calor de vistas was true. Only then was* *she convinced. Of course, I treated my great granddaughter. People who are aware of their strong eyesight should avoid looking at children. Otherwise, they knowingly cause calor de vista.*

A lot of people know me because I've healed patients who were very sick. For example, there was a man from Rio Grande who had been seen by reputable physicians and healers from Managua without any success. However, he was cured when he finally came to see me. I remember, he was very skinny and told me, "Ma'am, I've faith in God that you will help me to get better. No one has given me the medicine I need. But I've heard that you're a very good healer. I've sold the few cows I had to buy modern medicine, and I'm still very sick." "Well," I said, "if you do have faith in God and in me, I'll be able to help you." I treated him and in a matter of days, he was completely cured. He was so grateful that even now he still sends me gifts, once in a while. I don't really charge people for healing them. I only charge a nominal fee for my work and time, not for the medical knowledge and ability. In this way, people value what I do. Nothing can be free. We're all poor here. So, I only charge 10 Córdobas for children and $15 for adults ($0. 60 and $0.80 U.S approximately). But, if they can't pay, that's fine, too. I still help people. We're a community and must help each other. They need me today; I might need them tomorrow. I don't go out offering my service. People come to my place.

I learned to heal from the woman who raised me. I called her mama Ester. As a youth, I used to carefully watch my adoptive mother work as a healer. "Pay attention girl!" she would shout, "this healing knowledge will be your inheritance." It won't make you rich, but it'll help you earn enough to eat once in a while," she used to tell me. As time went by, I kept on learning more until I became a locally recognized healer. I gained *my own experience from mama Ester. She was a healer and a midwife. She would heal good and bad (witchcraft). I would always carefully watch her treating both, good and bad. "This is the only thing I will leave you," she would constantly tell me. I paid attention, and thank God, I was able to learn both medicines (good and bad). Now I teach my children or anybody who is interested in learning how to heal. Indigenous healing knowledge belongs to all of us. But, not anybody can be a healer. You need to have el don de curar. As a midwife, I've delivered more babies than I can remember. Even the birth registry kept in the medical post is filled with my name. As a midwife, one must give mothers the strength to face the experience of birth. I usually give the mothers a tea of quelite fraile leaves to stop the pain. This tea helps them be ready to give birth. While the woman is pushing, I grab the baby until it is out. Once the baby is out, I cut the umbilical chord, get out the placenta and bathe the baby. Once the baby is out, I treat the umbilical chord with camphor. I burn the umbilical chord with a candle made out of tallow cow's lard. I also give the mother a bebedizo to clean the womb. Take me, for example. I've eighteen children of my own, and look at my belly. I don't have a big belly. That's the wonder job that the bebedizo does. It helps reestablish the body.*

Although we all share the same basis of Indigenous knowledge, there are subtle differences in how we do things. For example, I have my own techniques to deal with complicated births. Most important of all, one must be very brave and calm, and not to panic during an emergency. Once, I had this difficult birth to assist. I remember the baby was coming feet first. I asked for some help. Another woman came to help me. I told her not to panic and to stay calm. With her help, I was able to grab the first foot and search for the second one. Once I grabbed both I was able to pull the baby out helped by *some serious pushing that the mother did. There was another time that another midwife called upon me to assist her with a birth. She was having serious difficulties. The mother had been in labour for about three hours. When I arrived, I told the mother that if it was too complicated we were going to send her to the hospital. However, at the end we didn't have to send her to the hospital in Rivas. Thank God, we were able to deliver the baby successfully.*

After giving birth, we give the mother the bebedizo. The mother must follow the special diet. For the first 15 days, mothers should only eat wild honey with corn tortilla, pinol (ground corn meal), roasted cheese and meat with plenty of pepper, and bread. Their head and ears must be covered at all times. Women must also wear a waistband and, for 40 days, mothers must avoid any type of physical work. After that, they feel like brand new again. This isn't something I'm making up. You can ask anybody in the community. They'll all tell you the same thing because what I'm telling you is ancestral knowledge. We've kept it because that's how we do things here. That's what we believe. Now that, as you can see, the new generation of kids wants to be modern, we must strive to promote our culture, our medicine, our traditions, our way of thinking and doing things. That's why I'm happy to tell you all this, because you told us you will write it down for people to read. So, there you have it.

Discussion

In the previous narratives, the medical benefits of la medicina Indígena are clearly manifested. However, it is equally noticeable how Indigenous medicine represents an important aspect of *who* Veracruceños are, and how medicine is linked to their history, culture, and identity. For instance, in the first testimony, healer Felipe Urrútia states that his medical ideas and practices are ancestral knowledge, and that it represents the way "Indigenous people do things". The same healer also speaks of Indigenous medicine as "an Indigenous way," and about the importance of transmitting that knowledge to his children because, "it's our way of preserving our culture and identity, our things". Agustina Pavón, the oldest healer in the village said, "*doctores* (biomedical physicians) do not understand our illnesses." In the same paragraph, she also claims that if their Indigenous medicine were nonsense, as biomedical physicians claim it is, they would be dead by now. According to Agustina Pavón, what ultimately matters is what their medicine represents for them as an Indigenous people, not what others think about it. Healer Rafaela Carbonero claims that everybody in the village can testify the truth of her medical knowledge because it is ancestral wisdom. She states that maintaining their culture, medicine, and traditions helps maintain their way of thinking and doing things.

Explicitly linking Indigenous medicine to their Indigenous identity is a relatively new concept in Veracruz (as elsewhere). Until recently, Veracruceños have emphasized land and genealogy as markers of Indigenous identity. As part of a conscious effort in the early 1990's, culturally conservative leaders in Veracruz started to infuse Indigenous medicine with political meaning in order to use it as a cultural strategy to claim Indigenous identity. These initial testimonies are merely a preamble to a more systematic and politically conscious discourse used by Veracruceños to link Indigenous medicine with identity formation. However, a key concept, using Bourdieu's theories of *habitus* (1989/1990), is how Indigenous medicine, as a system of acquired dispositions, function on the practical level as categories of perception and assessment as well as the organizing principles of medical action. In this sense, habitus or habituated practices, is an individually operationalized set of expectations and understandings based on the collection of experiences Veracruceños encounter that shape their sense of the "rules of the game." It is what regulates interactions within a field in an observable, "objective" manner, affecting not only the individual but also all those who interact with that individual. According to Sulkunen (1982:108), "habitus of a group or class defines a symbolic order within which it conducts its practices--in every day life as well as in the feast."

Faith as a Healing Agent

As expressed in some of the narratives above, for Veracruceños faith seems to be at the base of their healing process. Faith is created, expressed and reified by the symbolic, ontological, religious, mystical, and psychological life of the community. Faith is the currency through which the idioms of seeking medical help and providing medical help are socially exchanged. Faith, nevertheless, is not a given. It's a culturally acquired medical mode of feeling, thinking, and behaving. In fact, many patients who seek the help of a curandero, in Veracruz, do it with ambivalent feelings of faith and skepticism.

> *Incredulity reigns supreme in the minds of those who try to imitate modern thinking. It's only when people find themselves in a situation in which the unthinkable happens that this becomes desirable medical practices, and an absolute state of faith is acquired* (Agustina Pavón).

Faith becomes a medical necessity, a healing tool, a base for ontological security. In the end, only the healing power of faith defeats doubt and mistrust in certain medical practices. For Veracruceños none of the existing medical practices, biomedical or Indigenous, are absolutely effective without the ultimate healing power of God. In this respect, faith is always linked to the healing and willing power of God. Although there is also secular faith in the village, it has been said that pain can also make us humble for it has a flickering light for redemption.

Furthermore, it is also important to recognize that faith-claims also act as a protective measure for the healers: "I'm not a brujo because I believe in God and God does not allow us, healers, to harm people". Faith claims shelter those who put their social and material lives at risk by agreeing to attempt healing, thus exposing themselves to accusations and envy (Young-Leslie 2005, personal communication).

Medical Knowledge as Communal Property

Although in many ways, healers are the social repositories of medical knowledge in the community, medical knowledge is not the exclusive property of locally recognized healers. For Veracruceños, there is no monopoly on medical knowledge and technology. Healers routinely and overtly share their medical "secrets". In fact, most adults (72%) posses a great deal of medical information, which they share informally everyday in the community.

The Veracruceños I spoke with passionately talked about how they have many remedies to treat a variety of illnesses. As people talk about their own physical and spiritual complaints, they also exchange medical advice. In this way Veracruceños form, reestablish, and reinforce social and kinship alliances. The exchange of medical ideas, remedies, and diagnoses is always done so among equals and in this instance the mobilization of medical knowledge does not create social stratification. Those who happen to know more than others are healers. However, they have the same social importance as the rest of the members of the community. In this manner, outside the particular medical settings of healers, on a daily basis, medical knowledge is also exchanged, enhanced, and reified by ordinary Veracruceños. Every adult in the village, women and men alike, has general Indigenous medical knowledge. For example, most people know and understand that certain plants, minerals, animals, body movements, gestures, special touches, and prayers are necessary to obtain physical, spiritual, and mental well-being. Typically, most households have at least twenty different medicinal plants in the garden, which are used to prepare medicine for, at the least, the one hundred most common illnesses that I list on table 2.5.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have attempted to give some ethnographic texture to the Veracruceños' medical experiences as primordial affairs, la medicina Indígena and medical witchcraft as part of the *ordinariness* (Higgins and Coen 2000) of everyday life in Veracruz. Given the ubiquitous nature of illness, in many ways, Veracruceño ordinary social life revolves around ideas of health and illness. The importance of knowing about illnesses, remedies, diagnoses, medical treatments, and healers, is as much a prominent concern. On a daily basis, and in an informal fashion, numerous instances of consulting, diagnosing, treating, curing, medicalizing, and preventing illnesses also take place in the form of conversions and outside medically established settings. Ideas about health and illness are important in Veracruz because they are also idioms through which everyday conversations are socially lubricated and everyday social tensions are minimized. As people talk about medical issues, they also express their social preoccupation with their own health and that of their fellow villagers. Mutual preoccupation seems to be another form of healing and establishing health among members of a community.

> *Sometimes just by being asked how am I doing I feel a little bit better. So, I always ask people how they are doing* (Marta Cajina, cultural consultant).

In this chapter, I have tried to provide a detailed review of the Veracruceño medical system by examining important aspects of its historical development, as well as the contemporary characteristics of its etiologies, pharmacopoeia, nosology, diagnostic methods, healing practices, and knowledge about its healers. Having a general understanding of what constitutes the Veracruceño medical system is important in order to appreciate the social conditions that allow Veracruceños to use their Indigenous medicine as a strategy to claim ethnic identity. In addition, the narratives presented in this chapter provide the ethnographic context of these social conditions and of the particular relationship between the people and their medical system. Through these narratives, it becomes evident how illness and healing, as medical experiences in Veracruz, are also polysemic or multivocal expressions of a variety of spiritual, social and material aspects of the community's life. As pointed out by Good (1976:14), "illness idioms crystallize out of the dynamic dialectic between bodily process and cultural categories, between experience and meaning". Thus, in Veracruz, the same illness suffered by different people, simultaneously or during different periods, may be experienced and healed in dissimilar ways, since the meaning of an illness is not so much linked to its signs and symptoms, as it is to its causation and origin of the cause.

Medical configurations in Veracruz both provide the meaning for, and shape the experience of an illness and healing episode because they constitute the cultural references people use to speak of, and relate to such primordial experiences. Medical experiences in Veracruz are primordial because they constitute the elementary principle in which ancient modes of feelings are organized. Medical experiences are primordial because, as pointed by Gil-White (2000), primordial ascription is not really a matter of rational choice, but one of tradition and the emotions evoked by perceptions of common ancestry. In this regard, it is evident that Veracruceños experience their Indigenous medicine as an ancient, stable, and socially unifying medical system. For Veracruceños, the medical meanings embedded in, and produced by, their Indigenous medicine represents the continuation of a common ancestry because of a perceived common history. Furthermore, the medical experiences of *being sick* and *being healed* are concrete bodily events, which for Veracruceños also represent an essential part of the internal world. Emotions evoked by perceptions of bodily experiences and the external world are produced by the *dialectic* relationship between bodily arousal and cognitive interpretation that form the ascribing of meaning (Damasio 1995). Cognitive interpretation does not take place in isolation, nor is it necessarily a rationally calculative action. As social agents, Veracruceños have a repertoire of *internal complex of dispositions* or a *habitus* (Bourdieu 1998) that determine and condition how they ordinarily act upon medical experiences, as evident in the external world, without having to consciously think about it. Indigenous medicine in Veracruz, as it will be shown in chapter 6, is also a discursive notion about their Indigenous history. All of this sets up the necessary background to understand *how* and *why* Veracruceños use Indigenous medicine as political metaphor and signifier of ethnic identity. These issues, which constitute the central argument of this dissertation, are further addressed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER VI

MEDICO-CULTURAL STRATEGIES AND THE SEARCH FOR IDENITY

Rescuing our Indigenous medical practices is to recover our Indigenous identity and culture. Implementing and using our traditional medical practices is expressing our Indigenous identity (ccl. Pedro Gonzales).

Chapter Overview

In this chapter, I will address the way cultural reinvigoration in Veracruz is actualized by the revival of the Veracruceños' Indigenous medicine. I discuss how Veracruceños began to use medicine as a marker of Indigenous identity by consciously encouraging the recuperation, conservation and implementation of their Indigenous medical practices and beliefs. Cultural consultants and community leaders elucidated the most salient aspects of the historical, ideological, ethnic and ontological importance of Veracruceño Indigenous medicine. A review of the 1992 Estelí Medical Encounter, the event that formalized the strategy to claim identity through Indigenous medicine in Nicaragua, is also included in this chapter. As well, I present my interpretation of why Veracruceños chose medicine over other cultural institutions to assert group identity. Finally, I analyze the possible cultural contingencies that motivated Veracruceños to choose and use Indigenous medicine as a signifier of their ethnic identity. In particular, I look at how Indigenous medicine in Veracruz is pervasively linked to ideas of ethnic boundary formation, maintenance and the reproduction of historically transmitted symbols, as well as to local ideology and ontological tensions.

The Formal Call to Claim Indigenous Identity through Medicine

In 1992, national governments in the Americas and in parts of Europe celebrated the 500th anniversary of Christopher Columbus' arrival in the then so-called New World. The same year, Indigenous societies in the Americas were signaling or commemorating —not celebrating— the memory of 500 years of Indigenous resistance against imperial, colonial and mestizo domination. As part of a series of protest activities during the 500th anniversary commemoration, several Indigenous groups from Nicaragua made an organized effort to formally claim their Indigenous identity through traditional medicine. From the 4th to 6th of October of 1992, around 350 delegates, mainly from Nicaragua, but also from Belize, Colombia, Honduras, El Salvador, Costa Rica, Panama, Puerto Rico, Mexico and Venezuela, gathered in the city of Estelí, in the department of Estelí, in Nicaragua for *El Primer Encuentro Continental de la Medicina Indígena, Negra, Popular y Tradicional: 500 Años de Resistencia Indígena, Negra y Popular.* (The First Continental Encounter of Indigenous, Black, Popular and Traditional Medicine: *500 years of Indigenous, Black and Popular Resistance*. Since I did not personally attend this gathering, I base my analysis on what I was told by Alfredo López and the written literature produced by it.

This medical encounter was organized by the Continental Secretariat for the 500 Years of Indigenous Resistance Campaign. Most of the funding came from several European and Nicaraguan non-governmental organizations (NGO's). The most prominent donors were the German based *Pan para el Mundo* (Bread for the World) organization, Popular Norwegian Aid, and the Managua chapter of the Continental Secretariat for the 500 Years of Indigenous Resistance Campaign. Although a nominal distinction was made between "Indigenous", "black", "popular" and "traditional" medicine, the labels "Indigenous" and "traditional" were used interchangeably as overarching categories for the others.

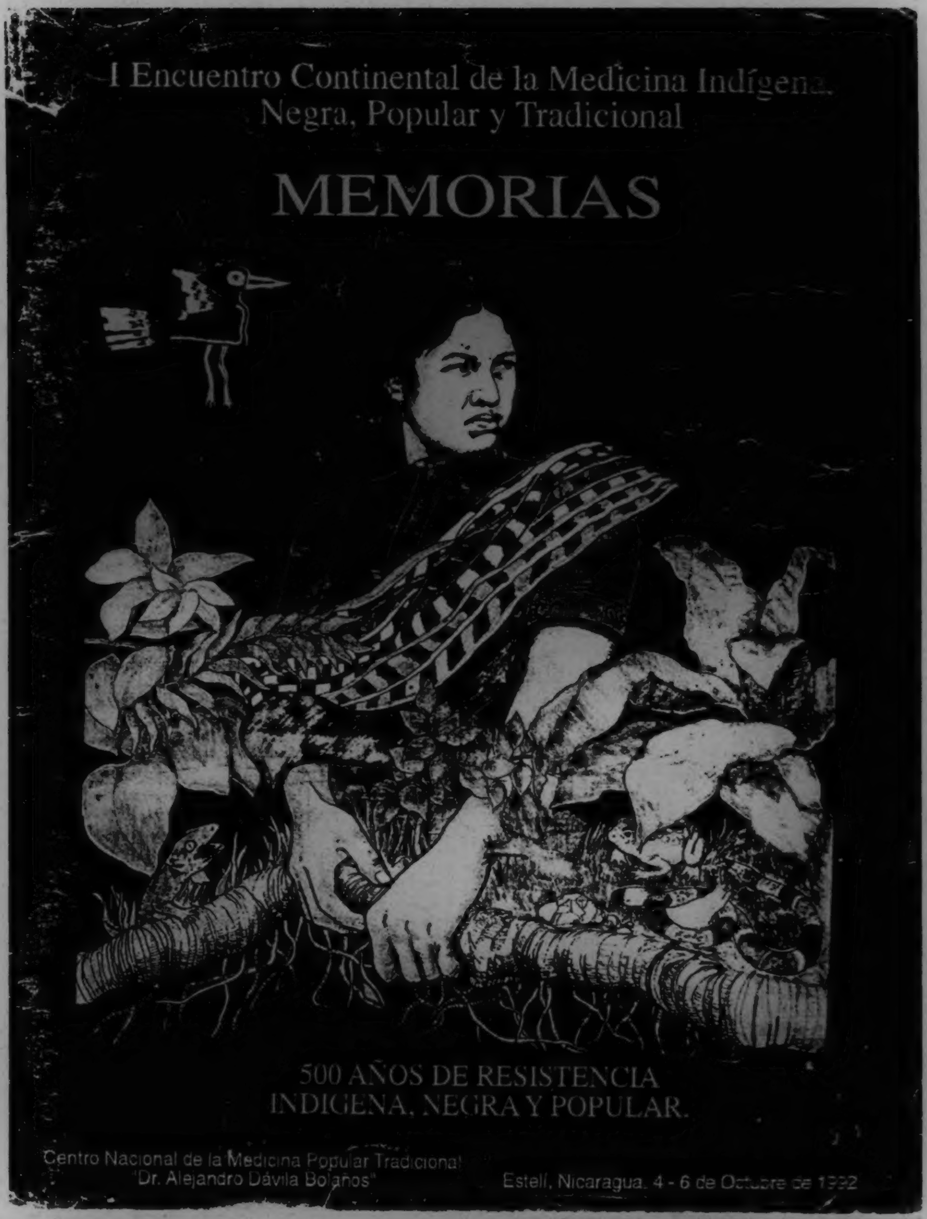
I Encuentro Continental de la Medicina Indígena,
Negra, Popular y Tradicional
MEMORIAS
500 AÑOS DE RESISTENCIA
INDIGENA, NEGRA Y POPULAR.
Centro Nacional de la Medicina Popular Tradicional
"Dr. Alejandro Dávila Bolaños"
Estelí, Nicaragua, 4 - 6 de Octubre de 1992

Figure 1.6 Cover of the publication of *Memorias of the I Continental Encounter of Black, Popular and Traditional Medicine: 500 years of Indigenous, Black and Popular Resistance* (1992).

Most of the participants were curanderos and curanderas, midwives, bonesetters, diviners and brujos representing Indigenous or traditional medicine from all over Nicaragua and the aforementioned countries. Community health and preventive medicine workers, physicians and other kinds of medical professionals who sympathize with the Indigenous cause were also invited. Nationally and internationally distinguished guests speakers known for their work on Indigenous or traditional healing were also invited. Scholars from Mexican, Nicaraguan and Colombian universities came to the event, as either advisers or observers.

According to culturally conservative leader Alfredo López, who also attended the event, it was a politically charged gathering, filled with strong emotions and a generalized sense of Indigenous unity. All of the keynote speakers made strong allusions to how Spanish invaders subjugated Indigenous people to unspeakable cruelty, and how Indigenous people fought back and resisted. They all emphasized how their Indigenous struggle is not outdated, and that, therefore, any form of resisting cultural domination is a need of the present. A book containing some of the speeches, experiences, testimonies, aspirations, ideas and resolutions of the participants titled Memorias (memories) was published the same year by the organizers of the encounter. All the testimonies and reference from this book I present and make here are my own translations from the original Spanish version.

During the workshops, free debating was the norm and all of the discussions were oriented toward designing specific strategies for rescuing, preserving and defending the practice and ideology of traditional medicine. The following were the three main objectives of the event:

1) To gather ideas in order to rescue, safeguard and promote Indigenous medicine as part of the historical and cultural heritage of Indigenous peoples.

2) To analyze, discuss and bring to light the current local and international situation of Indigenous, black, popular and traditional medicines.

3) To define strategies for the self-determination of Indigenous medicine, understood as the cultural expressions of the Indigenous peoples.

In addition to the objectives above, two central themes served as general ideological and historical background for the discussions.

1) Indigenous medical systems as an ancestral form of cultural resistance and survival.

2) Historical roots of Indigenous medicine and the search for strategies for Indigenous medical autonomy.

The following passages are examples of the discourse of resistance that predominated during the event.

> After 500 years of ancestral medicine's resistance, medical heritage of the Indigenous people, we keep on defending our ancestral medical culture... Since they first arrived, the Spanish invaders have persecuted, repressed and nearly destroyed our autochthonous medical systems. Thousands of shamans, healers, bonesetters were burned accused of witchcraft by the invaders. The invaders did not understand our culture because it wasn't their own (Sotomayor in *Memorias* 1992:12).

> It is only natural that traditional medicine belongs to our people because we carry it in our blood. Our ancestors passed it on to us (Nicaraguan Indigenous delegate in *Memorias 1*992:12).

> Our ancestors gave us traditional medicine so that we can live in the present and in our future. We must preserve it because it was born with us. It belongs to us (Nicaraguan Indigenous delegate in *Memorias* 1992:12).

During the three days of the event, delegates discussed the ways in which the strategy to claim ethnic identity through the recuperation and implementation of Indigenous medical practices could be put to work. The following excerpts show some of the Indigenous participants' views about the legitimacy, character, and context of Indigenous medicine

> Traditional medicine is the legacy our ancestors left for us, which we must preserve and protect. Wherever it is in danger of extinction, we must rescue it because a people without its traditional medicine has no future (Venezuelan Indigenous delegate in *Memorias* 1992:32).

> Traditional medicine belongs to us because its goes to the most recondite places in the countryside where the tentacle of the official medicine has never gone. It exists to solve the medical problems of our population… traditional medicine is always in our home gardens and backyards (Honduran Indigenous delegate *Memorias* 1992:32).

> Indigenous medicine belongs to us because Indigenous blood runs through our veins. Indigenous blood from our ancestors who gave us their medicine so that we could survive (Indigenous delegate in *Memorias* 1992:33).

> We must defend our traditional medicine because it represents our roots… No one can cut, or unearth them (Indigenous delegate in *Memorias* 1992:33).

In the past, Nicaraguan Indigenous groups had unsuccessfully organized similar events. Part of these events' failure to achieve their objectives, according to the organizers of this encounter, was because they were referred to as symposiums, conferences or seminars. These labels drastically changed the content and the course of the discussions, as they would typically go in the direction of academic, scientific and folkloristic perspectives. Non-Indigenous perspectives limited the focus of the discussions and rendered the purpose of the events irrelevant. By giving previous events academic labels, the original purpose of the activities, which was to value Indigenous medicine for its own merits, was lost. Sterile discussions of the epistemological validity, efficacy and clinical value of Indigenous medical practices would overshadow the Indigenous perspective on the matter. This time, however, organizers made a conscious effort to correct the mistakes of the past (*Memorias 1*992). Understanding and celebrating Indigenous medicine from an Indigenous perspective was the main objective in Estelí.

During the Estelí encounter, organizers insisted that their Indigenous systems, pejoratively referred to by mestizos as "informal medical systems" are based on well-established Indigenous beliefs and practices. "Indigenous medicine is grounded in culture-specific ideas about health, illness, nature and the universe, rather than on a set of informal or improvised arguments (Sotomayor in *Memorias* 1992:8).

> Our Indigenous medical system has its own means for diagnosing, treating, applying therapeutic methods, and producing our own healers. We are not simple 'agents' as we are deprecatorily referred to by the official biomedical system (Sotomayor in *Memorias* 1992:8).

Although Nicaraguan health authorities, scholars and medical professionals were present during the event, organizers gave participatory priority at the podium to Indigenous medicine practitioners and their beneficiaries. The objective was to grant Indigenous healing its true place in the historical continuation as an expression of ethnic identity expression (Memorias 1992).

> *It was clear that the people who came to the encuentro were in support of the search for Indigenous identity and self-determination through the use of Indigenous medicine. We understand traditional healing beliefs and practices as the ancestral medical system that has given continuation to our Indigenous identity and culture* (ccl. Alfredo López).

> Indigenous medicine is a gift given to us by our ancestors. Indigenous medicine is about our own identity as Indigenous peoples (Nicaraguan delegate *Memorias* 1992:70).

Working toward defined objectives aiming at influencing the whole Indigenous culture in Nicaragua, Indigenous leaders established a set of ideas and particular manners of thinking during the encounter. A formal discourse to claim identity through medicine was being officially and formally made in 1992 at this event.

> Traditional medicine belongs to our people. Indigenous medicine is an important part of the cultural roots of our people. Indigenous medicine is the repository where we as Indigenous people preserve our ancestral knowledge. That knowledge is the ancestral wisdom derived from the ancestral worthiness of pre-Hispanic societies. That worthiness allowed Indigenous people to integrate

> themselves totally into their surrounding world, into nature... That is the deepest root of traditional medicine (Chávez Alfaro in *Memorias* 1992: introduction).

Organizers of the encounter anticipated that the event would make Indigenous people think more consciously about their Indigenous medical systems. They claim that in the context of the current clash between their ancestral healing practices and the national medical scheme or biomedicine, Indigenous identity consciousness was urgently needed. They seemed convinced about the need to develop strategies and mechanisms that would help protect and advance Indigenous traditional therapeutic resources, both material and human. They were also concerned with the integration of traditional healers into the national medical plan. This last strategy was aligned with the goal of thoroughly meeting the medical needs of the Indigenous population because "in a clearly multicultural society there cannot be a mono-cultural medical system" (Sotomayor in *Memorias* 1992:15).

After three days of exchanging medical experiences, knowledge and practices as well as discussing the role Indigenous medicine plays in the construction of Indigenous identity, participants arrived at list of decisions and resolutions. Here I list the seven most relevant resolutions to this study.

> We, healers, midwives, diviners, bonesetters, remedy givers, botanic specialists, shamans, health promoters, and community health workers, gathered in three workshops, all partakers of the First Continental Encounter of Indigenous Black, Popular and Traditional Medicine, have come to the following conclusions:

1) Indigenous medicine is the heritage of all our peoples. It is what we inherited from our ancestors. It [Indigenous medicine] constitutes our identity as a people.

2) Our medicine was born with us… it is part of our cultural roots.

3) [Non-Indigenous] people must realize that we heal not only with plants; we also heal through the spirit. It [our Indigenous medicine] is part of who we have been and of who we are now.

4) We must protect our natural resources that make our medicine possible…

5) Our medicines benefit all members of our communities. They are less expensive [than patented medicines]. [Our People] prefer our medicine for
It offers patients the social contact they need during the healing process.

6) Our medicine is a double edge sword. It is important because it responds to social problems and has organizing and educative power. Governments are aware of this. That is why they do not want us to organize among ourselves. They want to isolate us forever.

7) We must continue teaching our medicine from generation to generation, collecting it in books, multiplying it in workshops and encounters, divulging its knowledge, and putting into practice what we learn by sharing our experiences. (*Memorias* 1982:70)

The following pledge was made during the closing ceremony:

> We, the delegates to the First Continental Encounter of Indigenous, Black, Popular and Traditional Medicine, gathered in the city of Estelí, Nicaragua, Central America, having discussed our situation, and concerned about the great economic, social and political problems which threaten our legitimate medical practices, and in favour of the health of our peoples, pledge the following:

1) To keep our identity alive. Five hundred years ago, people with strange and harmful cultural ideas tried to exterminate our identity in order to conceal what they stole and pillaged from us. The pain and harm caused by the invaders still continues today with grave consequences for our environment, bringing more misery for all of us in an increasingly hostile world

2) To seek respect for our ideas and ways of saying what we believe and feel, such as our love for mother earth that gives us protection, food and remedies that keep us healthy and help us preventing illness.

3) To claim our right to preserve and develop our medical heritage in order to treat and prevent the illnesses that afflict our people.

4) To promote the dialogue among different ethnies as the only way to understand each other and solve our problems (*Memorias* 1992:73).

The Impact of the Estelí Medical Encounter in Veracruz

According to some Veracruceño leaders, the Indigenous institutionalization of medicine as a marker of ethnicity during the Estelí Encounter gave Nicaraguan Indigenous people and Veracruceños in particular, the opportunity to formally legitimize the process of reshaping their ethnic identity. While in the past Veracruceños had implemented other cultural manifestations -- traditional dances, political organization, and religious festivities-- as forms of cultural resistance and affirmation of their Indigenous identity, the Estelí Encounter was innovative in that, for the first time, Indigenous medical ideology became "official" Indigenous policy for claiming ethnic identity. This encounter gave Indigenous partisans, healers and community leaders the opportunity to consider the cultural, as opposed to only the clinical, value of their medical system within the politics of identity. Veracruceños, like the rest of Indigenous communities in Nicaragua, took advantage of this new momentum provided by the Estelí encounter as a cultural strategy to fortify their independent struggle for ethnic identity.

Although many Veracruceños have consciously regarded their medical beliefs and practices as part of their Indigenous identity for as long as they can remembers, they had never consciously used them to claim and assert their Indigenous identity. In the new context created by the Estelí encounter, medical knowledge acquired value that went beyond the clinical domain. The social formation of group identity expressed in medical ideology and behaviour became a cultural expression in itself. The reinterpretation of Indigenous identity in terms of medical ideology and practices produced a conscious medical discourse and a particular behaviour about an unconscious cultural tradition. Generally, Veracruceños have been healing, treating, diagnosing and explicating illnesses for as long as they have existed as a group. In this sense, culturally conservative Veracruceño leaders claim they are pragmatically using Indigenous medicine only to signal and not to negotiate the meaning of a reality they regard as primordial — namely, their Indigenous identity.

> *We don't have to struggle to demonstrate who we are. We are born being what we are, Indigenous people. However, we fight so that people recognize what and who we are* (ccl. Alfredo López).

In 1996, four years after the Estelí encounter, and as part of a series of the follow-up meetings, the second gathering of the Health Commission took place in Managua. This meeting was particularly important because Indigenous delegates formulated several strategic declarations that continue to nurture the ideological basis for the Indigenous claims of medicine and ethnic identity. During this meeting, members of the Latin American Indigenous Parliament[35] and other Indigenous leaders from Bolivia, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Peru and Venezuela declared:

> We accept the definition of health agreed upon by a working group of Indigenous people from Guaranda, Bolivar, Ecuador in 1995, in which health is conceived as the harmonic coexistence of the human being with the environment, with him/herself and with others, and geared towards a holistic well-being, filled with individual, social and spiritual tranquility (Segunda reunión de la Comisión de Salud Managua 1996).

The above declaration offers an Indigenous alternative to the operant Nicaraguan definition of health, which in many instances sees health as divorced from the social, historical and environmental conditions that determine it. It represents a form of ideological resistance against the dominant discourse on health. It is the result of the momentum and the profound influence the Estelí Medical Encounter had on many Indigenous peoples in Latin America. Several similar encounters have been organized in Mexico, Honduras, and Colombia, among other countries. In Nicaragua, the encounter had a tremendous influence on communities from the pacific and central regions of

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[35] The Parlamento Indígena de América was created during the Second Encounter of Indigenous Legislators on August 31, 1988. Its permanent office has been in Nicaragua since 1988. It was created with the aim of providing a political and social space where Indigenous legislators can discuss and make public the particular problems faced by Indigenous people in order to find their respective solutions.

Nicaragua. In Veracruz, for instance, it encouraged Indigenous leaders, particularly culturally conservative leaders, to assertively defend what they see as their inalienable right to an ethnic identity. Ever since the encounter, local leaders in Veracruz overtly promote Indigenous medical values, practices and rituals as markers for identity. In some respects, this does not seem to be a difficult task because Veracruceños fervently believe that their Indigenous identity markers are not based on artificial links, but on culturally primordial connections to their land, history, culture and common ancestry.

Medicine as a Marker of Indigenous Identity

The revival of the Veracruceño Indigenous medicine accompanies the latest formal strategy to claim their ethnic identity. The scheme aims to reinvigorate precariously kept medical traditions, while strongly encouraging and increasing the conscientious practice of current ones. Healers, bonesetters, midwifes, shamans, diviners, herbalist, Indigenous health promoters and the general Indigenous population are being motivated by leaders everywhere to consciously use traditional medicine as a way of asserting their ethnic identity. Since 1992 Estelí Medical Encounter, leaders in Veracruz have met regularly with healers and the general population with the aim of making people politically aware of the cultural value of Indigenous medicine. Thus, the discourse on Indigenous medicine and identity in Veracruz exists within a large Indigenous political movement.

Subsequent to the Estelí medical encounter, a discourse of cultural pride about Indigenous medicine quickly developed in Veracruz. Veracruceños now assert the historical and cultural importance of preserving and promoting those rituals and their ideological components. Since 1992, Indigenous medical configurations, illness categories, vernacular etiologies, pharmacopoeia and nosology, healing rituals, spiritual diagnosing and prophylactic devices, botanical healing and divination are some of the elements that are being implemented as part of the medico-identity strategy in Veracruz. In the past, people made use of medical knowledge according to tradition, but not in a political manner. With the introduction of the "reviving of Indigenous medicine" as an awareness strategy, a new disposition toward their Indigenous medicine is emerging. Ideologically, this medico-identity strategy is guided by an elaborate discourse on how traditional medicine *is Indigenous identity* and how Indigenous identity is conversely expressed in traditional medicine. In the last decade and a half a more committed attitude toward consciously knowing and understanding Indigenous healing is being adopted. Most local leaders in Veracruz claim that this medical strategy has made people more aware of the ethnic importance and historical value of Indigenous medicine. Gaining acceptance as a mainstream medical practice is not a particularly Indigenous concern in Veracruz. Independently of the cultural revival, Veracruceños leaders claim the community had previously depended on Indigenous medicine for most of its regular medical needs. Although this was mainly due to a lack of alternatives, it was also as a way of resisting the medical gaze of modernization, which was first introduced to the community through the discourse of hygiene and sanitation (my thanks to Young Leslie for making this point, 2005, personal communication).

> *Our Indigenous medicine is a way of preserving a certain autochthonous quality in our health issues and culture. Our ancestors always healed themselves with*

> *traditional medicine, and thanks to it, they were able to live healthy lives. Occidental [Western] medicine is relatively new in our community. However, we all know that through medicine and other modern stuff, they [non-Indigenous people] are trying to domesticate us, of taking away our traditions, our Indigenous identity, our culture and our own way of surviving with our own Indigenous medicine* (ccl. Alfredo López).

Although original in some respects, claiming identity through traditional medicine is not unique to Veracruceños. During the last two and a half decades, the same strategy has been used by several other Indigenous groups in Mexico, Bolivia, El Salvador, Honduras, Belize, Venezuela and Colombia, among many others countries (Sotomayor 1992). Other examples of using traditional medicine to claim Indigenous identity are also found in Africa, where Fela Anikulap-Kuti, struggling against Western Cultural imperialism, wanted Africans to reclaim traditional methods of healing (Grass 1986). Crandon-Malamud also found that among the Aymara in Bolivia, class and ethnic boundaries are redefined and negotiated though the use of medicine.

To tailor group identity though the use of medicine is not unique to Indigenous peoples either. In a recent study, Andrews and Sutphen (2003), show how medicine can provide new insights into colonial identity, and how multiple perspectives on identity can be accommodated within a single narrative. The perceived self-identity of colonizers through the adoption of western and traditional medicine as complementary aspects of a new, modern and nationalist identity is also explored in their work. Individuals and groups define their identities in ways that both expresses and reinforce ideas about self-representation, by choosing from a number of variable and available cultural traits

The growth of reinvigorated identity as a source of group membership and the pursuit of distinct rights to protect ethnic identity boundaries is a relatively universal trend that has gained momentum in recent years (Niezen 2003:6). In Veracruz, culturally conservative leaders consciously decided to re-evaluate Indigenous medicine because they believe it to be an essential component of the community's life and an expression of their ancient culture. For many Veracruceños, healing is way of expressing key cultural values by means of appropriating the usage of Indigenous medicine not only as a system of healing, but also as an indicator of group identity.

The quotes below convey some of the ways in which Veracruceños regard the historical and cultural value of Indigenous medicine and its relation the construction of group identity.

> *Our medicine is our culture. There are illnesses in our community that afflict our people that doctors* [physicians] *do not understand, because they don't' understand our culture* (ccl. Mateo Mendoza).

> *When you think of a bonesetter or a healer, you think of an Indigenous group. You think of traditional knowledge, you think of a culture and behind that culture, there is an identity... an identity that belongs to the bonesetter, to the healer and the group to which they belong as people* (ccl. Conchita Gonzáles).

After the Estelí medical encounter, the subsequent success rested on each individual community. Each community was then responsible for designing its own approach to implementing the medical-identity strategy. In this regard, one of the most important accomplishments of the Estelí encounter was the creation of national Indigenous agreement in terms of implementing a unified Indigenous identity discourse. Claiming identity through Indigenous medicine was not going to be an isolated Indigenous practice any more for Veracruceños. Through Indigenous consensus, it was now a nation-wide strategy, recognized by all Indigenous institutions and movements as a new form of Indigenous struggle. The encounter opened up the possibility for Veracruceños to engage more consciously in activities, which they had not historically thought to have such political significance. Culturally equipped with a new vision and understanding of their past, as is evident in the quotations above, Indigenous people clearly stated their intentions of claiming and asserting their Indigenous identity through medical practice and ideas in the present.

Why Indigenous Medicine?

> The issues as to which new cultural forms are compatible with the native ethnic identity are often hotly contended... but a great amount of attention may be paid to the revival of select traditional cultural traits, and to the establishment of historical traditions to justify and glorify the idioms and the identity (Barth 1969:35).

The preceding section begs the question of what makes medicine more enticing than any other cultural institution on which to construct group identity. Why did not Veracruceños choose their dances, food, social organization, cosmogony, or any other cultural manifestation to claim their identity? What is so pervasively powerful about medicine? It is clear that, among many other cultural options, Veracruceños did not choose medicine randomly. However, it is my opinion that in addition to the cultural thrust given by the Estelí medical encounter, there are other considerations that could suggest why medicine was a viable choice. Taking as a premise that Veracruceños have the capability and desire to be agents in their own lives, rather than subjects, I interpret those actions in the following contexts: boundary maintenance, historically transmitted symbols, group ideology and ontological tensions. In this section, I discuss each of these contexts by elaborating on Veracruceños' constructions of the significant markers of their Indigenous identity, adapting an idea first put forward by Geertz (1973:9). Borrowing his analytical model, in my interpretative study, I want to sort out the Veracruceños structures of signification. I seek to identify the elements of Veracruceños' culture they regard as meaningful and relevant to their actions, particularly as these actions relate to the endeavour of claiming Indigenous identity through medical practice.

1. Indigenous Medicine as a Cultural Boundary

> Clearly, there is not a simple connection between the ideological basis of a movement and the idioms chosen; yet both have implications for subsequent boundary maintenance, and the course of further change (Barth 1969:35).

Over the years, Veracruceños have implemented a series of strategies to demarcate and maintain group and geographical boundaries. Typically, the most widely used had been the natural lines of demarcation provided by the Camarón and Guachipilín rivers and three stone signposts on their territory. Veracruceños can actually touch and see their territorial boundaries, which include their most celebrated and historical signpost: *la piedra labrada*. Such landmarks had been very effective boundary markers given their tangibility and visual practicality. Even nowadays, regardless of kinship ties, some people in Veracruz feel they are Indigenous people simply because they were born within the territory of an Indigenous community.

> *Well, I guess I am an Indigenous person because I was born here in Veracruz, and this is an Indigenous village* (cc, Mateo Lima)

For most Veracruceños, however, territoriality is beginning to lose its binding quality. As the population keeps growing, many families move outside the legally recognized Indigenous territories, and Veracruceños now often make a categorical distinction between "the people" and "the territory". "People" refers to all of the members of the Indigenous community living both in and outside the legally owned Indigenous territory; "territory" only refers to the land, which the community legally possesses. However, although some people dwell outside Indigenous territory, they are not outside the Indigenous jurisdiction, culture and kinship ties.

As natural and physical boundaries start to lose some of their original meaning, the community looks for replacements. In this regard, Indigenous medicine has come to fill part of the void left by some of these traditional boundaries. Veracruceños do not interpret changing cultural boundary definitions as a sign of cultural weakness or disintegration, but as an act of cultural legitimization in the face of social change. Barth (1969:14) has suggested that "the cultural features that signal the boundaries may change, and the cultural characteristic of the members may likewise be transformed, indeed, even the organizational form of the group may change". These changes are part of the continuing dichotomization between members and outsiders (Barth 1969:14). As need arises, Veracruceños change or modify the cultural form and content of some boundaries in order to preserve their ethnic identity. They do so by using any of the available culturally valued institutions; in this case, Indigenous medicine is an important one.

Indigenous medicine is a central and culturally valued institution in Veracruz because its relevance touches every member of the community profoundly. Everyone in the community, at one point or another, gets sick, feels healthy, desires health, and avoids getting ill. Ideologies of health and medical practice form an integral part of those experiences because they are reified in the social life of the community; thus, making Indigenous medicine a valuable cultural institution. Barth (1994:17-18) argues that central and culturally valued institutions and activities in an ethnic group may be deeply involved in its boundary maintenance by setting internal processes of convergence into motion. Medicine is an internal process of convergence because it expresses group identity as a multi-contextual experience. When an Indigenous person gets sick, or is being healed, he/she engages in a set of distinctively Indigenous medical rituals. When an Indigenous person fears illness or death, has faith in medicine and healers, and experiences the pain and agony of illness and the joy and happiness of health, he/she does it with a particular ideological background. This is the case because all of those experiences are unavoidably related to the experiences of disease. "Disease"- and in this particular case, illness/sickness-, as suggested by Good (1994:53), "belongs to culture, and in particular to the specialized culture of biomedicine". In this sense, culture is not only a means of representing disease and the epiphenomenal experience of it, but is essential to its very constitution as a human reality. The overarching character of a particular medical ideology that guides many existential tensions gives those experiences central importance and makes them a base for cultural convergence. In this sense, medicine as a central and culturally valued institution and activity in Veracruz is not only involved in boundary maintenance, but in the creation of the particular ethnic identity, those boundaries demarcate. Indigenous medical ideology and practices imply distinctive cultural behaviour —ways of experiencing, diagnosing, treating and conceiving of illness— that maintains boundaries by signaling difference. This is important, because ethnies "only persist as significant units if they imply differences in behaviour, i.e. persisting cultural differences" (Barth 1969:15).

Hewitt (1994:1) has suggested that we human beings live in a world of names for ourselves, for others, and for our activities. The names announce who we are, what we are doing, and why we are doing it. In this regard, when Veracruceños call themselves Indigenous people and claim that identity through the usage of Indigenous medicine, they are not only creating boundaries, they also are inviting others to identify them as what they claim to be, to interpret what they do as relevant to their requirements, and to trust they are what they claim to be for their words and deeds. Therefore, when cultural conservative leader Pedro Gonzales metaphorically refers to the people of Veracruz as being what they do, he is also creating boundaries to demarcate their ethnic identity.

> *If we want to keep on existing as an Indigenous people, we have to protect our Indigenous identity. The process of mestizo acculturation has caused a lot of*

> *damage to our identity. It has caused a lot of cultural erosion in our identity. We need to build a strong barrier to protect our culture. Let us not abandon that which we do and the way in which we do it. We are our food, our traditional laws, our dances, our medicine, our culture and the way we think and feel as Indigenous people. That's who we really are* (ccl. Pedro Gonzales).

In this passage, it is clear that one way of protecting and building ethnic boundaries in Veracruz is by engaging in activities that are important for the community. Indigenous medicine seems to fit neatly into this category. In the process of collective identification, medical categories define who the Veracruceños are, and where they are situated in the larger order of things. This seems to be the case because, as pointed out by Friedman (1994:117) "[s]elf-definition does not occur in a vacuum, but in a world already defined". Pedro Gonzales is clearly marking Indigenous medicine as a cultural trait, a part of the repertoire of practices and knowledge that makes Veracruceños unique. This contrasts with the construction of scientific biomedicine, which is, categorically, non-specific to any particular people or culture.

Indigenous medicine as a culturally distinct practice, grounded in a particular ideology, is an effective way of boundary-building because its conceptual distinctness sets Veracruceños apart from other people, in this case from the immediacy of the mestizo culture. Barth (1969:14) suggests that when an ethnic group is defined as an ascriptive and exclusive group, the nature of continuity of its ethnic distinctiveness clearly depends on the maintenance of boundaries. Fischer and Hendrickson argue that "ethnic markers' that work must be easily identifiable, regularly employed and important to the people involved' (2003:121). Indigenous medicine is precisely this kind of ethnic marker for Veracruceños. Contemporary healing in Veracruz is a way of expressing key cultural values by means of re-appropriating the usage of Indigenous medicine not only as a system of healing, but also as an indicator of group identity. For the people of Veracruz, recovering, rescuing, invigorating or claiming an Indigenous identity is equal to mending, protecting, vitalizing or asserting ethnic boundaries.

> [E]thnic boundaries are maintained in each case by a limited set of cultural features. The persistence of the [ethnic] unit then depends on the persistence of these cultural differentiae, while continuity can also be specified through the change of the unit brought about by changes in the boundary- defining cultural differentiae (Barth 1969:38)

2. Historical Considerations

In some respect, culturally conservative leaders reinvent tradition in Veracruz (therefore alter it) by overtly evoking the past to reconstruct and validate the present. Borofsky (1989) and Firth (1967) have both found instances in which Indigenous traditions, in the process of being preserved, are also being altered. However, in being altered, they are also being preserved because "the past is being made meaningful to those upholding it in the present" (Borofsky 1989:144). Borofsky argues that, ironically, [Indigenous people] and anthropologists preserve a past that never was, but they preserve it in a way that is meaningful to present-days audiences. However, this seems to be an inevitable and necessary process because traditional knowledge must continuously adjust to changing circumstances; it must continuously adapt so as not to die out or become buried away in some symbolic archive. It seems that meaningfulness to the living takes precedence over precise fidelity to the past, simply because what is at stake is a pragmatic rather than a correspondent sense of truth (Borofsky 1989:145). In this regard, Veracruceños regard their Indigenous medicine as a profoundly historical phenomenon. As an ancestral practice, it has been essential for Indigenous survival and resistance, protecting both the lives of people and their cultural heritage.

> *We have culturally survived and resisted the Spanish invasion, colonial domination and mestizo oppression thanks to our Indigenous medicine. It is and it has been vital for our physical and spiritual survival* (ccl. Pedro Gonzales.).

Veracruceños typically believe that of the total ancestral cultural heritage, only a few of their cultural manifestations are preserved in a somewhat autochthonous condition. In some way, as pointed by Young-Leslie (2005 personal communication), it seems that since the state and society targeted and tried to alter visible signs of Indigeneity – dress, language, etc.– that less obvious things, like Indigenous medical perceptions and practices, are all they have left for 'tradition' and marker of Indigeneity. In chapter IV, I discussed how the Veracruceños medical system has integrated foreign and historical traditions into a single scheme, which Veracruceños generally regard as their own vernacular one. Young Leslie (1999) shows how Tongans tend to use geographic/nationality markers as indicators for all sorts of categories of things, including types of pandanus leaf (for weaving), foods such as pineapples, and bodily vermin. She claims that, to some extent, the existence of Tonga and non-Tongan medical treatment categories does re-affirm Tongan identity, but it must be recognized that Tongan culture and identity is a bit cosmopolitan, just like allopathic medicine is. For example, they take in Samoan medical practices and make them Tongan, in the same way that Western Christianity is Tonganized (Young Leslie 1999).

Fischer (2003) argues that, theoretically, it is next to impossible to document or even speak of an (authentic) autochthonous custom that has survived the passage of time. His argument is that culture is an ongoing hybrid construction built by individuals caught up in the immediacies of everyday life. However, it seems to me that the rigid belief that cultures are dynamic does not accurately reflect the fact that, although constantly changing, humans have been able to infuse culture with a sense of ethereal fixity, or to accurately remember and retain forms of knowledge and practices over several generations. Veracruceños cling to that notion of relatively unchanging cultural steadiness as the basis for the authenticity of their present traditions. Lindsey (2004) suggests that authenticity is the belief that some aspects of identity are so integral to existence, or are so primordial, that they are therefore accepted without their content being judged. It is in this sense that they can speak of some level of authenticity, of an autochthonous condition. New elements of foreign cultures can be incorporated easily into an existing cultural system, precisely because cultural knowledge and skills are very fluid and flexible and move from person to person or time period to time period in forms or contexts that can be more or less recognizable with social meanings, which might be altered just as much. When people learn from others, they almost certainly adapt that cultural knowledge to their own benefit and make it fit into familiar cultural contexts and patterns. In this way, new elements —material, social or ideological— are, then made autochthonous by the adopting culture to form part of the vernacular way. For the last

500 hundred years, many of the Indigenous healing traditions in the Americas have incorporated European elements into their vernacular systems by modifying those elements to fit Indigenous schemes (see Campos Navarro 1997; Cosminsky 1976; Foster 1960; Trotter and Chavaria 1981; Rubel 1984; Scheper-Hughes 1983).

In contemporary Veracruz, Indigenous medicine, as an essential symbolic and material aspect in the community, plays an important role in providing the historical grounds for the construction of ethnic identity as a primordial experience. People can define their identity only against the background of things that matter, or what Cuypers (2001) calls "a horizon of significance". "Only if I exist in a world in which history, or the demands of nature, or the needs of my fellow human beings, or the duties of citizenship, or the call of God, or something else of this order matters crucially, can I define an identity for myself that is not trivial (Taylor 1992: 40-41). Bekker and Leildé (2002) suggested that an identity is based on shared meaning drawn from culture and history, constructed from influences from above - leaders, governments and organizations- but also internalized from below. The individual person considered in isolation lacks the capacity to constitute meaning and rule-following comprised by a historically determined order. Instead, it is argued that social agreement in form of life and social customs are necessary for the every possibility of meaning and rule-following (Wittgenstein 1953). Medical practices for Veracruceños constitute a set of rules that people must follow in order to obtain both health and ethnic identity. The true nature of autonomy cannot be radical self-determination but rather must be authenticity, which involves as possible conditions the recognition by other people- social dependence- as well as horizons of significance —forms of life (Wittgenstein 1953). Thus, it is clear that what motivates the behaviour of Veracruceños as ethnic actors is not a calculation of their individual interests, but rather the horizon of significance that binds them, as they themselves perceive that horizon and its history. The Veracruceño medical system is embodied in a set of historically produced rules about medical, magical, divine and social ideas, categories and practices, which people has internalized. In doing so, ordinary Veracruceños act upon medical experiences without having to consciously think about it. In this way, such experiences lend themselves to be perceived by Veracruceños as ontological links to their sense of selves, which is embedded in a distinct group identity and history.

In the same fashion that suffering is a defining quality of being human, so too is the alleviation of suffering – healing (Kleinman 1995:21). Medicine, as a system of healing, is the historically constructed response to both naturally and socially produced suffering. As an organized therapeutic practice, medicine has historically allowed people, in every society, to develop different sets of ideas, beliefs, norms, practices and values in order to cope with and understand the nature of illness. Cultural diversity consequently has created an equally diverse array of medical systems. Each of these systems dynamically responds to the historical and cultural particularities that produce and reproduce them.

As I stated it in the beginning, this dissertation is about the extra medical usages of medicine; therefore; it seems to me that, apart from medical efficacy and the sense of control that having some form of treatment offers in times of illness or misfortune, the most historically important aspect of Indigenous medicine for Veracruceños is the fact that medical practices and ideology are embedded in a set of social and medical rituals.

And rituals, as suggested by Comaroff (1993) are the prime mechanism of social reproduction. In this sense, Indigenous medicine, as a set of rituals, is a vehicle of history-in-the-making. It contributes to sustain and legitimize the world in place through the enactment of daily medical rituals that, in this case, are also rituals of group identity.

As an important part of a historical process, Indigenous medicine also provides the cultural means to produce meaningful claims of ethnic distinctiveness, political and regional autonomy and rights for self-determination. Indigenous medicine is not only a healing practice; it is the everyday enactment of clinical, social and spiritual reality; it is a form of cultural identity and political resistance. By practicing it, Veracruceños reproduce and renegotiate the meaning of a system of historically transmitted symbols. Because in essence it is based on ancestral knowledge, Veracruceños see it as historically legitimate. Its relevance to the present is ineluctably based in its past. Consequently, it seems that for many Veracruceños recovering the past is a matter of great importance for future group survival. Recovering the past requires a sense of urgency and at the same time a delicate approach to piecing together constituent elements of culture (Niezen 2003). These elements can be understood only as an intricate whole, for they are sometimes barely visible through their internal complexities, tensions, and differences (Niezen 2003:7). Thus, the contemporary expression of Veracruceño Indigenous medicine is historically situated and sustained by the *primordial attachments* it evokes as social experience.

3. Medicine as Ontological Security

As a socially produced system, Indigenous medicine is part of the broader Indigenous conceptual configuration. It is the ideational arena whereby particular views of the universe are claimed, produced and understood. These views constitute the overarching understandings of the society. In this way, Veracruceño's Indigenous medical system is more than the sum of diagnosing and treating illness. It is a whole cultural configuration that not only mediates and informs reality, but it also creates an ontological security, which helps people to palliate the experience of human pain, suffering and affliction. According to Good (1976), culture-specific assumptions as distinctive idioms about distress feed back and ultimately influence the experience itself. People's quest for relief from pain and suffering engages them to find mitigation wherever it may be available. In this sense, Indigenous medicine constitutes a cultural mechanism for responding and adapting to the demands of human suffering, whether they are biological, social or spiritual in origin. Finding a way of alleviating suffering means creating narratives, discourses and metaphors about the nature and origin of the illnesses - that produce the suffering. The medical explications people create provide them what Giddens (1991) calls "ontological security." Faced by concrete suffering, individuals crave a sense of security. Ontological security is also linked to the social tensions of the politics of being. The search for identity is also the search of social recognition. Identity is the ontological meaning with which we infuse others and ourselves as empirical objects in the world. The ontological security that medicine evokes in time of despair makes it an enticing choice for claiming group identity. At the conscious level, ontological security is important because as Laing (1960:39) pointed out:

> A man [sic] may have a sense of his presence in the world as a real, alive, whole, and, in a temporal sense, a continuous person. As such, he can live out into the world and meet others: a world and others experienced as equally real, alive, whole, and continuous. Such a basically *ontologically* secure person will encounter all the hazards of life ... from a centrally firm sense of his own and other people's reality and identity.

Indigenous medicine is the kind of collective reality that help people cope with their everyday anxieties and dangers, by providing group ontological security. In this sense, collectively an ontological security provides Veracruceños with group-strength.

Furthermore, beyond the primary function of curing or alleviating physical and spiritual complaints, Indigenous medicine provides other forms of meanings because at the ontological rather than at the methodological level, their medical system is also based on medical faith, rather than only on alleged medical truths. Medical faith in my own terms, is what Young (1992, personal communication) calls hopes for results as opposed to expected results. The idea of medical faith or hopes for results is based on the conviction that whatever medical procedure one undergoes, it will ultimately cure or alleviate the afflicting illness or that at least, it will ameliorate one's own condition. The ethnographic record shows that every medical system is capable of evoking these sentiments (Baer 1987; Engel 1977; Good 1994; M. Good 1995; Hahn 1985, 1995; Joshi and Mahajan 1990; Lock 1980; Young 1989; A. Young 1981). Expected results, on the other hand, are based on the assurance that any adequate medical intervention will ultimately bring the anticipated results, regardless of whether or not it actually does. To illustrate this point, Young (1990 personal communication) suggests that all medical practices -biomedical and traditional alike- have the capacity of demonstrating: (1) the realism of the people's medical beliefs, and (2) the appropriateness of intervention. For example, routinely in biomedical configurations, surgical operations are "*successfully*" performed on patients in spite of the fact that some patients die. This kind of medical incidents, however, are considered to be scientifically, morally, and legally normal. This is so because within any medical system, medical beliefs are regarded as descriptions of reality, hence as neutral truths. In this respect, every medical system creates a set of explications, which equally account for both successes as well as for failures, without profoundly affecting its ideological base. In an article about sorcery and magic, Levi-Strauss (1963) made this same general point.

Although aware of the fact that medicine and medical practices are not always efficacious, most Veracruceños faithfully undergo medical treatments. Because medicine is always appealing to the sufferer, its curative properties are often mystified in Veracruz and endowed with ultimate power to bring the desired state of being of the afflicted person. Illness, malnutrition, stress and other health related problems seem to be endemic in Veracruz, as well as in all of rural Nicaragua, the ontological security found in their own medical narratives about illness helps them cope with the powerlessness of immediately changing the material conditions that create them.

Medical symbols are in some way ontological representations of human experiences of suffering, diagnosing, treating, healing, and preventing an illness and even succumbing to one. Medical symbols have central importance for Veracruceños because health and illness as human experiences lend themselves to more emotional and cultural significance than does a dance, a particular dish or a traditional social structure. Its significance stems from the fact that disease engages both the sufferer and the people around the sufferer in the construction of meanings about the experience. Illness involves fear- fear that one has been targeted by a witch; fear that one's child will be crazy for life; fear that one's spouse will die or that one's reputation will be ruined. In Veracruz, illness embodies both the cultural meaning with which it is understood, and the sensorial experience upon which that meaning is constructed. Its discourse in Veracruz encompasses the infinite repertoire of taste, shape, colour, odour, texture, touch, and feelings of any physiological, psychological, spiritual and social experience, classified as an illness.

> *When one is sick, one perceives a particular odour in the air, a particular taste of things [food], one's own tongue and saliva have a particular taste, a sick taste, the body and the senses feel sick, even daylight seems different when one is sick, one's body feels like of a different shape* (ccl. Alex M.)

> *When one is sick, life feels differently. One feels not only physically sick, but also spiritually sick. One feels sick inside oneself* (Felipe Urrútia, healer).

For Veracruceños, the signs and the symbols of illness foreshadow suffering and even *la muerte* or death. It is an ontological experience because it truly defies people's biological urge to live. Illness existentially reminds Veracruceños about the blissful state of health. For Veracruceños, illness typically represents the biological reification of all the symbols, icons, and signs of decay, fear, pain, anxiety, despair, agony, death or the loneliness of its pain, as they referred to it.

> *It is not the same to speak of death* [symbolically addressing it[36]] *than it is having a lethal and intimate encounter with it. The real meaning of an illness is the very loneliness of its pain, which is often difficult to put it into meaningful words* (Agustina Pavón, healer).

Nevertheless, even in the painful loneliness of sickness described by Agustina Pavón, there are culturally constructed symbols, which are therefore infused with social meaning and consciousness. In this sense, medical meanings and consciousness are grounded in the cultural life of a society and not in isolated and symbolic vagaries. They are ontological symbols. Thus, the social meaning of medical symbols, as they represent the condition of diseases, emerges out the experience itself as it is culturally and ontologically reified in the life of sufferers.

> [W]hile serious sickness is an event that challenges meaning in this world, medical beliefs and practices *organize the event into episodes* that give it form and meaning (Young 1978:19)

In many ways, the meaning of an illness is a subjective experience that belongs to those who experience the painful loneliness of sickness, either as the somatic sufferer or as an empathetic observer. Nevertheless, that very painful loneliness is meaningful as part of a collective system of meaning. That is why medicine, as a system of collective signification is also a cohesive force of cultural unity that encompasses diversity of experience. Because it is a collective system of signification, it is at the very core of group identity in Veracruz. "Self" and "other" perceptions of identities are intricately based on cultural categories, which symbolically and emotionally demarcate who we are, what we do, and how we feel in both our own internal world and the world around us. Therefore, particular ways of experiencing and dealing with existential realities such as illness create a particular way of being in, and understanding, those worlds. Similarly, particular ethnic strategies to form identity are linked to prevailing ideas and practices of self-representations. Veracruceños represent themselves through their Indigenous medicine, because as a healing practice it is regarded an essential part of their existence, but also because it provides them with the needed ontological security to face the painful loneliness of disease and as social and individual beings.

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[36] People can symbolically address death by claming not to be afraid to die, particularly when they feel healthy, physically strong or less vulnerable to illness.

4. Medicine as Local Ideology Reified in Practices

As I began to see increasingly beyond the clinical value Veracruceños ascribe to Indigenous medicine, I realized how medical ideology is a framework for the contingencies of everyday life. My interactions with Veracruceños soon led me to realize how their medical beliefs and practices draw from a pragmatic and salient medical ideology, which extends beyond the clinic settings. Veracruceños' medical ideology is also a discourse that provides an overarching understanding for their history and culture. Because it is conceived as an inherently ethnic practice, Indigenous medicine empirically demarcates Veracruceños' group identity by setting ideological boundaries of distinctiveness. In this sense, Indigenous medicine provides the ideological horizon where empirical claims about Indigenous identity and history are legitimized. It gives

Veracruceños a sense of "who we are" by ideologically basing their group identity of what they distinctively do as a culture. Indigenous medicine constitutes a trope of signifying practices that all Veracruceños, in their condition as healers or patients equally share. Every Veracruceño reifies, through the dyadic experience of healing and being healed, the social meaning of the group identity that is signified by medical practices and ideology. Healer Agustina Pavón, in reference to a treatment she was applying for *quebranto* (broken heart) during one of my many visits, told me the following:

> *This is how we do things here because that's the way our ancestors taught us. That's who we are; that's the way we are; that's the way we have been. That's the way things have been; that's the way things are.*
>
> *I go to see healers because that's what we do here in the village when we get sick. When my children get sick I do the same. As far as I can remember that's what my parents and grandparents did too* (cc, Marta Cajina).

Through Indigenous medical ideology and practices, Veracruceños tailor explanatory models (Good 1994; Kleinman 1995) for important life experiences to suit local representations of health and illness as they relate to other aspects of social life, such as history, ethnic identity and social relations. As an ideology, Indigenous healing provides unconscious or tacit understandings of consciously experienced human processes, i.e., illnesses, misfortunes, material progress, witchcraft and health. In Veracruz, like in every society, health and illness compel people to reflect consciously about certain aspects of the social order. As is evident in some of the ethnographic narratives, Indigenous medicine allows people to construct vernacular explications for the working of social order, because ideas about health and illness are also social manifestations of an ideologically conceived natural order. Hence, as an ideology, Indigenous medicine also spontaneously —and pragmatically— creates the cultural hegemony that grants order and meaning to Veracruceños' social actions. The meaning and the order granted by the hegemony become the basis for Indigenous medical action.

Comaroff and Comaroff (1991) suggest that ideology is the determined ordering of the world that is seen to result from the action of people. In order to impart a sense of reality and meaning, ideology is realized in the sense of conscious understanding of signs. Hegemony, on the other hand, operates at the level of tacit understanding and as the grounds for interpretation and expression. It is in this way that hegemony constitutes the unconscious determination of signification from which reality may be normally constructed (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991). Through ideology, but in this case through medical ideology, "the syntactic parameters of expressive forms that are potentially meaningful and relevant in a given situation for a group of people" (Fletcher, personal communication), are socially and individually reified. The reification is possible thanks to the sense of reality ideology produces in relation to the actions and events it intends to explicate. The story of Manual in chapter V provides an adequate example of the reality-defining power of ideological narratives. People unconsciously construct meaning out of their own actions and experiences guided by existing local ideologies.

Medical ideology provides Veracruceños with the kind of moral and practical certitude that socially empowers them by legitimizing their history, their cultural practices, and their group identity. Because it engages every member of the community, medical ideology allows genuine participation in the construction, distribution, and consumption of meaning. In a self-reinforcing fashion, this participatory ideology permits Veracruceños to affirm their group identity because it also produces a collective discourse that legitimizes their ethnic identity. Since talk-of-identity merges with the practice-of-identity, identities cannot be separated from the knowledge and representations which they express and repress (Yon 2002:2).

Cultural, historical, medical, and social claims of Indigenous identity are, first and foremost, ideological. The meaning of an illness and its etiology, as well as the reasons why a particular illness affects a particular person, in a particular time, are encoded in medical explicatory models (Kleinman 1978; and Good 1994) that are also about social relations, culture, history and group identity. However, the matter-of-fact relationships people believe exists between themselves and others [and between things], "are not perceived purely as such. They are grasped only through the agency of cultural formulations of them" (Geertz 1973:367). The idea that "Indigenous medicine is a marker of Indigenous identity" is a symbolic representation of one of the several cultural boundaries that ideologically separates Veracruceños and mestizos.

5. Indigenous Medicine as Resistance to Modernity

> Globalization has become the academic and media buzzword of the early 21st century… Definitions of globalization are almost as legion as the number of experts on the subject (Lewellen 2002:7).

Anthropologists, and other social scientists, have pointed out at how a relatively new scale of organization has emerged within only the past 200 years (Bodley 1994). Contemporary globalization, however, is generally understood as "the increasing flow of trade, finance, culture, ideas, and people brought about by the sophisticated technology of communications and travel and by the worldwide spread of neoliberal capitalism, and it is the local and regional adaptation to and resistance against these flows" (Lewellen 2002:7). Based on Wallerstein (1979) and other scholars' work (Bergesen 1990) this global system has been referred to as the capitalist world-system. On the one hand, global cultural homogenization is dramatically sweeping the world, modifying, changing and irreparably damaging the already fragile surface of many Indigenous cultures. On then other it is, paradoxically, invigorating them by its imminent threat. Around the world, North American corporate culture is destroying local traditions, knowledge, skills, artisans and values. Veracruceños have felt the impact of globalization. Permeating into the community through television and radio sets, newspaper, magazines, migration and tourism, Veracruceños are now more exposed to, and affected by, the current waves of global commercialization or the capitalist world system.

> *Occidental [Western] medicine is relatively new in our community. However, we all know that through medicine and other modern stuff, they [mestizo cultures, capitalist North American and Europeans] are trying to domesticate us, to take away our traditions, our Indigenous identity, our culture and our own way of surviving with our own Indigenous medicine... That is why we must strive to keep our cultural heritage alive; [our heritage] is our roots, our history, and our soul.*

Without our culture, we would have nothing left. Globalization is a greater threat and a greater challenge for us, leaders of the community. But fighting against globalization and world capitalism it not easy; there are still some people in the community who fail to see the threat it poses for our community. Some people say to me, "I will not cease being an Indigenous person just because I drink from a bottle or because I wear some brand-name shoes." Without critically reflecting upon it, no one seems to see the harm in a pair of imported shoes or a soft drink, a foreign song, or in a television show. The harm it is not the drink, or the shoes, or the song, it is the effect those things have on our people by changing our taste, our values and our needs. If we desire too much those [foreign] things, we will devalue what we have: our culture, our identity... modern medicine, and particular, medical doctors do not give credit to our medical system. Disregarding our illnesses is disregarding our social and medical reality. It is changing the way see the world (ccl. Alfredo López).

If we were to rely totally on the Western medicine, imagine how much we would have to pay, if we could afford it, for medication. Rather than a healing system, Western medicine is a business. The aim is to make profits, not to help people. At least that has been our experience. For example, presently at the Rivas hospital, many patients are having their limbs amputated because it is cheaper than paying or buying medication for different treatment... Promoting our Indigenous medicine is a good way of resisting the economic domination of globalization and

> *an effective way of affirming our identity because it is culture* (ccl. Pedro Gonzáles).

However, as Alfredo López remarks, not every one in the village regards globalization as a something fundamentally disruptive to the community's way of life. In fact, some villagers see it as a way of enriching the community's culture, without losing their own.

> *If I have a television set at home, I can learn about other people's life in the world without giving up my own Indigenous identity. I can have plastic chairs, which are cheaper and more colourful than the ones we make here, without having to change my own Indigenous identity. I can even buy some modern medicine without abandoning my own Indigenous medicine. I drink Coca Cola, but I also drink chica, which is what our ancestors used to drink, but I am an Indigenous person just the same* (cc Mateo Cajina).

Culturally conservative leaders complained that ideas of material progress embedded in cement, plastic, consumer goods and medicine are widely and unreflectively embraced in Veracruz by many. They see globalization as cultural raid that must be fought back. They believe that it is by creating a stronger sense of ethnic identity that they can resist, or at least minimize, the detrimental effects of globalization. Fischer (2003) in his study of Tecpan, Guatemala, suggests that we know what global communication means to us, but we do not know really what it means to the people on the periphery of the globalization.

> *Through the television set, multiple foreign images, philosophies, taste, aspirations, cravings and even identities daily enter our homes. We are not only competing against a mestizo culture anymore. We have now to confront a bigger adversary, a world giant, "la globalización". However, every time we take a home remedy instead of buying a patented one, we are resisting modernity by preserving our own culture, our own way of healing* (ccl. Alfredo López).

> *Globalization affects our culture and it affects the little medicinal knowledge I have, which I received from God. Globalization insults, and profits from, our Indigenous knowledge... it takes it into other cultures but only to profit from it* (healer, Cipriano Martinez)

At the same time that many Veracruceños react, adopt, and adapt to circumstances imposed from outside, they struggle to assert their own cultural interests, principally their ethnic identity. For many Veracruceños, claiming ethnic identity through medicine is one of the many strategies to deform and defuse the impact of globalization. Yon (2000) has suggested that it would be a mistake to imagine that because globalization has made the boundaries so fluid and identity more open-ended, issues of identity no longer matter very much. Instead, he argues that the proliferation of meanings and identities in late modernity make the question of identity matter more, not less. Veracruceños believe that the torrent of ideas and objects that daily enter their familiar cultural environment may challenge, threaten and weaken their Indigenous identity, but it will not suffocate it. In a global village where people's cultural autonomy is increasingly being reduced, strategies to maintain group identity increasingly demand greater creativity and commitment. This creativity and commitment is not only sought by "a group of people struggling to make ends meet but also [by a group of people] struggling to make sense of their ethnic heritage" (Fischer and Hendrickson 2003:147). It is by their awareness of the danger posed by globalization that culturally conservative leaders in Veracruceños seek to protect their Indigenous identity and culture. Despite the increasing adoption of such items as plastic chairs, Coca Cola, foreign cloths, and biomedical pharmaceuticals, among other items, it seems to me that Veracruceños do both resist modernization or accepted it in their own terms. For some Veracruceños, Indigenous medicine is used as a way of resisting modernity. However, this is not to say that Indigeneity and modernity are diametrically opposed or that a person cannot be Indigenous and modern at the same time. Rather, I base my interpretations on how Veracruceños themselves express their opposition to globalization, which they see as a problem of modernity and as a new chapter of the long history of dispossession and deprivation they have already suffered as an Indigenous people. In this context, it seems to me that in Veracruz, "Indigeneity", as argues by Friedman (1999), is not about concrete Indigenous groups as such. Rather, it is also, "about a process of identification in the contemporary global arena that is a powerful expression of the transformation of the global system" (1999:408).

Discussion

Around a year before the medical encounter in Estelí took place, culturally conservative leaders headed by Pedro Gonzales had been working on the elaboration and implementation of a biannual socio-cultural plan for Veracruz. This plan was part of a permanent strategy culturally conservative leaders in Veracruz have been implementing since the 1980s to formally structure their political struggle for cultural autonomy and to improve the material conditions of the community. In this plan, they delineated the areas of work considered important and necessary by the community for the invigoration of their Indigenous identity and community life. Indigenous medicine was included as one of the top priorities. These leaders were politically conscious of how -beyond its medicinal value- important Indigenous medicine is in the community. They think that the ubiquitous nature of illness makes medicine a cohesive force in the community. Besides being a historically and culturally important institution in the community, it seems to me that Indigenous medicine is also regarded as a repository where primordial attachments tacitly reproduce the medical ideology that in many ways reifies Indigenous identity through medical practices. The erosion of Indigenous culture under mestizo influence urgently demands the creation of newer and stronger cultural boundaries. Given its historical value, identity formation capacity and the ontological security Indigenous medicine provides in the face of everyday tensions, it seemed to be much more enticing that any other institution to signify group identity. Its appeal stem from its strategic value to create cultural boundaries, provide historical continuation, ontological security, and a local medical ideology reified in social practices that are also utilized to resist modernity and promote local values.

Veracruceños' medical system was, in principle, designed or intended to address or alleviate what ordinary Veracruceños, and their group of medical practitioners, considered to be an affliction in need of attention. However, this same system, given its usefulness in this regard, is also used by Veracruceños to claim Indigenous identity by establishing that the system itself represents their culture, a distinctive way of being and feeling, from which they derive their group identity. As social agents, through their *habitus* (Bourdieu 1998), or their socially acquired, embodied systems of dispositions or predispositions, Veracruceños expressed a condition of the body. This is the case, because, as I have shown, in Veracruz medicine is always a corporal experience, even when spiritually related etiologies, symptoms and treatments are involved.

As it was expressed in the Estelí medical discourse, Indigenous medicine is also an idiom through which history, customs, ideology, powerlessness (in some contexts, but certainly power in others) and Indigenous cosmogony are expressed and articulated. In the Estelí encounter, Indigenous-medicine-narratives became a *performative discourse* (Bourdieu 1991) that provides the conditions for articulating and claiming Indigenous identity. In the everyday life, performative discourse constitutes for Veracruceños the utterances that produce in themselves the very act and the reality of the Indigenous identity they name and claim. In this sense the primary political function, as oppose to medical, of Indigenous-medicine-discourse is to act as a foundational charter that confers legitimacy on local medical practices by relating them to an Indigenous cultural essence-ethnic identity.

At more pragmatic level, however, medicine has been equally appealing to ordinary Veracruceños because the tensions of everyday life — illness, malnutrition, stress, economic affliction and powerlessness— have always found consolation, remedy and relief in Indigenous medicine.

> *Even if the healer does not cure me in an instant, I feel a lot better just by going to see him and taking the remedy he gives me. Those remedies have worked for so many years. We know they are effective* (Antonia Morales, patient).

> *I felt so much relief after the healer saw my daughter. She is not cured yet, but I know she'll get better* (Alicia López, patient).

> *When I am desperate and don't know what to do with my children when they get sick, I just run to see doña Agustina. She always knows what to do* (Julia Ayala, patient).

Indigenous medical theories provide culturally appropriate narratives as explanations for all the social, physiological and spiritual maladies in the community. From common colds, fevers, and minor falls to miscarriages and socially and individually devastating cases of madness by witchcraft, they are all explicated thoroughly by Indigenous medical ideology. In effect, ordinary Indigenous people in the community had always been claiming their ethnic identity through medicine by simply expressing it in their daily activities. Even before the implementation of medicine as a formal strategy to claim ethnic identity, Indigenous medicine was in place as a deeply rooted ideology that informs social and spiritual reality.

To verbalize an experience is to give meaning to it. In Veracruz, people's medical experiences acquire meaning as they signal people's understanding of the experiences themselves. A number of features of human rationality, such as consciousness, reflection, and even purpose converge to create those meanings. Therefore, in the process of acquiring meaning, an empirical experience such as an illness, for example, is then necessarily subjectified through cultural perspective. This is the case because claiming an ethnic identity is inherently inter-subjective, despite the illusory autonomy and fixity with which Veracruceños tend to treat their group identity. As ontological selves and social individuals, collective significations also help determine who each of us is and where we stand in the larger context of things.

Veracruceños chose Indigenous medicine to signal their own identity precisely because the cultural configurations it implies are believed to be ontological rather than instrumental for the reasons I have addressed. Although it may seem that by using medicine as a signifier of identity, culturally conservative leaders are primarily making instrumental associations as fundamentally rational and political actors, their motivations stem from deeper sentiments. Their motivations seem to be more spiritually guided rather than driven by a utilitarian practicality. As pointed out by Gil-White (1999:805)

> If ethnic actors are instrumentalists, then new ethnic groups should follow shifting interests, arising and disappearing as suddenly as do purely political or territorial alliances; people should spontaneously switch ethnic identity when it becomes convenient; and it should be more common for new ethnicities to spring forth around changing material interests and concerns, than for ethnicities to persist in spite of costs to their members' interests.

In Veracruz, the notion of ethnic identity is reified through Indigenous medicine because, as primordial experiences, medical configurations are an embodied way of engaging in the world, which Veracruceños perceive as a system of durable, transposable dispositions or habitus. Apart from its legitimate healing value, medical beliefs and practices in Veracruz are based on traditions and emotions evoked by perceptions of common ancestry, which is what gives them an aura of factual *primordiality*. As primordial experiences, medical belief and practices help to create an internal complex of dispositions that constitutes the Veracruceños' individual *habitus*, which functions as the generative basis of structured, objectively unified, social and historical practices. Thus, because Veracruceños' claims about ethnic identity are based on Indigenous medicine as an essential part of their habitus, these claims are relatively independent of 'rational', economistic or merely utilitarian considerations. It seems to me that, although shaped and conditioned by a history of conquest, colonization, land seizure, imposed governance, mestizaje, civil violence, poverty, dispossession and ethnic discrimination, i.e., concrete social actions, Veracruceños' ethnic identity claims also rely on the gratifying symbolism people find in realizing "who they are", to themselves and to others, and where they are situated in the larger social order. Langer (in Lambek 2002:136) has pointed out that utilitarian accounts of symbols and ritual are futile because the mind's need to emit a continuous stream of symbolic expressions is as strong as any practical interest. In this respect, it seems that the notion of group identity in Veracruz transcends economic rationality because it expresses other realities, which in this case are also symbolic ones, despite the biological base they perceive in their Nahua common ancestry.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

Thesis conclusion

Throughout the chapters of this dissertation, I have shown how beyond its medical value, Veracruceños also use Indigenous medicine to claim and reaffirm their precariously kept ethnic identity, i.e., using medicine for extra-medical purposes. I began by framing the question in terms of the Veracruceños' historical, social, political and symbolic urgency to conserve an Indigenous identity in the face of an overwhelming mestizo culture. Conditioned by a history of conquest, colonization, land seizure, imposed governance, mestizaje, civil violence, poverty, dispossession, discrimination, and globalization, Veracruceños have been constantly affirming, through different means, their ethnic identity in order to maintain certain level of cultural autonomy and the possibility to improve their material conditions.

In situating Veracruceños in the larger historical, geographic, economic, political and ethnographic context of Nicaragua, I showed how Veracruceños typically regard their history as a significant set of past symbols that continue to be meaningful in their present. As they see it, these symbols reify or vivify, the material, social and ideational life of their community. Given the fact that medicine is one of those embodied human experiences, many Veracruceños feel it is a suitable cultural institution to reify symbols of ethnic identity.

Veracruceños' historical experiences have specific influences on contemporary definitions of their identity as Indigenous people, and definitely underlie their preoccupation with its vulnerability and sense of erosion by the hegemonic mestizo culture. My argument particularly addresses Veracruceños' contrapuntal positioning between a primordialist or essentialist view on ethnicity and a constructivist take on protecting it. A key element in both constructivism and primordialist sentiments is Veracruceños' discussions about and use of la Medicina Indígena The main argument of the dissertation is that la Medicina Indígena offers a medico-identity strategy developed and implemented by Indigenous people in Nicaragua to claim ethnic identity through the use of Indigenous medicine.

I will now provide the conclusions drawn out of this study, based on the relationship I found between Indigenous medicine and ethnic identity formation in Veracruz. The ethnographic examples I presented demonstrate that in a cultural setting where medicine is intimately linked to people's everyday life, not only in terms of its medical value, but also in terms of a general understanding of their history and sense of selves and place, it is a viable way to build group identity. In this sense, Indigenous medicine in Veracruz is polysemic because it encodes ideas about their history, place, and of sense of selves, while it also provides medical configurations to cope with biological and spiritual distress. Through the use of medical ceremonies, medical ideas, practices and tradition, Indigenous medicine in Veracruz augments community practices that enhance an Indigenous worldview and ethnic identity. In addition to its primarily medical importance, Indigenous medicine in Veracruz encodes and expresses social, historical and symbolic meanings that people use to construct group identity. It is, as W.H.R. Rivers noted so long ago, a symbolic system, and all symbolic systems are valuable sites for meaning-making, at the level of the individual as well as the community. Indigenous medicine in this instance is also a social and historical metaphor that Veracruceños use to define their ethnic identity.

The Veracruceños' Indigeneity 'culturally objectified' (Handler 1988) in medical practices and beliefs is both an expression and a representation of the primordial essence that defines the very nature of their group identity. Paradoxically, although they typically regard their ethnic identity as being indelibly written in their biology, they also feel the need to culturally claim and reaffirm that intangible essence. Thus, constituted by the historical continuation of many of their cultural features, including their Indigenous medicine, Veracruceños distinguish their identity by culturally claiming the historical legacy of their medical practices. Besides the obvious medical benefits of diagnosing, treating and healing illnesses, Indigenous medicine creates a sense of "we" for Veracruceños, simply because cultural distinctiveness is always based on the ideological and historical particularities found and expressed in human action. Symbols of ethnic identity, such as Indigenous medicine, proclaim that this is a group with a history (one that is more than that of violence, suffering and dispossession), and that their history informs who these people are. History constitutes a social background that helps defining the present. Veracruceños can define their identity only against the background of things that matter, or what Cuypers (2002) calls "a horizon of significance".

> Only if I exist in a world in which history, or the demands of nature, or the needs of my fellow human beings, or the duties of citizenship, or the call of God, or something else of this order matters crucially, can I define an identity for myself that is not trivial (Taylor 1991 40-41 in Cuypers 2002:145).

In general, ethnic identity is about defining a collective sense of "Who are we". In this regard, although this study is incomplete, it points to the direction that for Veracruceños the question of "Who we are" is in part answered by the historical understanding of "Those who we had been" and "those who we continue to be". Besides kinship or bloodlines, historical continuation is also reckoned by the cultural practices, which contemporarily define the Veracruceños. In this way, Veracruceños answer the question "Who we are" by empirically strengthening the "we, those who do what we do and believe what we believe" — we who heal in this fashion, think in this way and behave in this manner, i.e., through performative discourse. They define their group identity in their everyday social practices and dispositions, which, as we have seen, include Indigenous medicine given its social pervasiveness and ubiquitous nature. Indigenous medicine is fundamental culturally and mentally to Veracruceños. They materialize the notion of their ethnic identity and medical ideas in everyday material and social practices. This seems to be consistent with the general anthropological argument that culture may set the conditions to the historical process, "but it is dissolved and reformulated in material practice, so that history becomes the realization, in the form of society, of the actual resources people put into play" (Sahlins 1995:7).

Through the dissertation I presented ethnographic testimonies that elucidate how and a why Indigenous medicine constitutes a primordial experience for the Veracruceño people, and how that primordialist nature is in some way is an important building block for ethnic identity formation in Veracruz. As is evident in chapters IV and VI, their ethnic identity is viewed as an "ineffable and invisible" essence manifested not only their biology, but also in the traditions and emotions evoked by perceptions of common ancestry, i.e., primordialist model. In Veracruz, these traditions and emotions fuel a tendency to act in a particular way, and regard their ethnic identity is a matter of commonsense. And Habitus, or socially conditioned systems of dispositions, is what, according to Bourdieu (1998), makes commonsensical thinking possible in the first place. In this regard, my research seems to indicate that Indigenous medicine, as an important and embodied cultural manifestation in Veracruz, is based on, and reflects a particular set of, social relations and social practices, which are analogous because medical relations become medical practices through habitus. The Veracruceños' social world is structured in sets of social relations though which they establish the nature of their ethnicity, history, identity, and other culturally important institutions, social relations, and ideas. Indigenous medicine, as a social discourse, provides a set of ideas about the particular medical relations and practices that define the system, which in turn reproduce the same system in the larger social context.

Foucault (1972:26) insisted that a "discursive formation", forms a "totality," a "background" against which facts and events stand out. In this sense, the total ideational environment of Veracruceños is constituted by their habitus. This includes the person's beliefs and dispositions, and prefigures everything that that people may choose to do. However, as argued by Bourdieu (1998), habitus, as the generator of social action, does not imply a conscious and rational calculation. Therefore, it seems to me that through their habitus, Veracruceños, as social agents, act without having to think about it, perceiving, in this way, their actions and experiences as essentially primordial because those experiences bind them together through a common history.

As a result, this study suggests that the primordial quality of Indigenous medicine in Veracruz stems, not only from the emotions it evoke as a matter of common ancestry; its primordialness also stems from the "ontological complicity" (Bourdieu 1998) between the objective structures of the Veracruceño external world and the internal complex of dispositions that constitute their individual habitus. In this respect, Veracruceños' actions, which include medical behaviour, are directed by their internal complex of dispositions, which do not exist independent of, but very much in relation to external social conditions, including a history of conquest, colonization, land usurpation, imposed governance, civil war, dispossession, marginalization, ethnic discrimination and globalization. As social actors, Veracruceños seem to operate in the social world guided by the categories of perception and evaluation that their habitus provides. Since Indigenous medicine is, above all, a social practice, the Veracruceños' habitus constitutes the principle according to which Indigenous medicine is generated and perpetuated. Indigenous medicine is also the process through which dispositions are acted upon and medical classifications (diagnosis, etiologies, sickness categories, medications, and treatments) validated in the particular cultural milieu that utilizes those elements to signal an ethnic identity. In the social epicenter of this "ontological complicity", medical actions acquired the status of primordial experiences, given the profound sense of realness they provides for Veracruceños. Thus, choosing Indigenous medicine as a signifier of group identity, it seems to me, is inextricably linked to the way medical meaning and experience are always connected to shared bodily and cognitive manifestations of human suffering and a desire to end it. Both of which are based on an elementary sense of being, a basic precondition for identity-formation given its ontological complicity.

Furthermore, through performative discourse, Veracruceños reify their Indigeneity, which for them is the evidence that ethnicity is something that people are born with. Ethnicity, for most Veracruceños is an unproblematic, stable and secure state of being that they all share as a group, which, nevertheless and paradoxically, must be safeguarded, and vitalized through various forms of cultural means. This paradox, or inherent contradiction, by no means represents a theoretical deadlock for the construction of a tidy understanding of their notions of group identity. On then contrary, as argued by Gil-White (1999:815), if human beings are not tidy, we should not tidy up after them in our theories. But at the same time, we must continue filtering the noise out of the theories we propose, instead of pretending that real causes are 'noise' just because they complicate our work. Therefore, I am here not interested in theoretically resolving the paradox, but rather in bearing witness to how Veracruceños instrumentally manipulate cultural symbols only to maintain an essence that, although conceived as biological, is culturally constructed; and can therefore be socially wiped-out in a matter of few generations. Nevertheless, given this tacit, yet inextricably intertwined relationship between primordial and constructivists ethnic experiences in Veracruz, it seems that their ethnic identity is, simultaneously, a construction and a form of being.

We defend our Indigenous identity because it is important for us and it is now very fragile. Our Indigenous identity is not something you can artificially create. However, it is something that can, and has been, destroyed through cultural contact and *erosion. If our people continue, to martially mix with non-Indigenous people and adopting non-Indigenous values and costumes, our ethnic identity will eventually be forgotten even by people who carry their Indigeneity in their blood. The best thing we can do if we marry non-Indigenous people is to teach them our way of life and philosophy. Otherwise, the thing that makes us Indigenous people before we are even born will fade away in oblivion* (ccl. Pedro Gonzales).

It appears to be that culturally conservative leaders initially proposed and promoted the use of Indigenous medicine to claim and affirm Indigenous identity because, somehow, people had already been unconsciously expressing their Indigeneity through it. Some of my detractors might argue that culturally conservative leaders clearly take a political, therefore instrumentalist, stand when they consciously use and promote Indigenous medicine as a strategy to claim ethnic identity. However, the fact that contemporary forms of ethnic organizations are predominantly political does not make them any less ethnic in character, as is often argued in instrumentalist ethnographies (Cohen 1969; Ogn 1992). Instrumentalist views basically assume that groups "are built up out of a cost-benefit analysis, in which some sort of objective interest or common goal, such as maintaining control of an economic niche, is the prime motive for group formation" Lewellen 2002:108). In fact, political movements like the culturally conservative one in Veracruz, "constitute new ways of making cultural differences organizationally relevant and a new way of articulating the dichotomized ethnic group" (Kleivan 1967 in Barth 1969:34). The continuous proliferation of ethnically based interest groups and conflicts in contemporary societies, either in small and large scale, confirms this theory. Veracruceños use Indigenous medicine as a primary resource not in a competitive and utilitarian fashion, but in a communally oriented manner in search of ethnic recognition, community respect and group unity. In this sense, it seems that what truly motivates the behaviour of Veracruceños as ethnic actors is not a calculation of their individual interests, but rather the symbolic value they find in the primordialness embodied in their history, as they themselves perceive that history. As pointed out by Keesing (1990), dismissing the symbolic motives and values through which humans orient their lives as hiding some covert ecological rationality is to misconstrue drastically the nature of the human we are trying to understand. In Veracruz, symbolic expressions are as strong as any practical interest.

Together Gil-White (1999:815), I argue that rational-choice version of the circumstantialist model of understanding ethnicity is basically claiming that people who do not believe they share common descent will nevertheless participate in collective self-delusion, by simply pretending they do so. This is the case because, as claim by Gil-White (1999:815), "pretending to share such descent is conducive to their common mobilization, and is desirable because it serves common, objective interests, rationally identified". On the other hand, in the Veracruceño primordialist model, the notions of common descent they share as ethnic actors both constrain and guide their behaviour. For example, in order to mobilize with relevant others whose interests they believe they share, Veracruceños could not easily invent new myths of common descent, where there was none. In this respect, Veracruceños, as ethnic actors, perceive common interests with those with whom they already assume shared descent, which for them can be expressed in culturally meaningful everyday experiences, including Indigenous medicine.

Potential Directions for Further Research

Where and what the potential directions for further research could stem from this study? Central America is a region in which extreme social, political, historical, and physical proximity between mestizo and Indigenous cultures has allowed both ethnic "cohabitation" and confrontation. The more we learn about the nature of both, the better equipped we will be to reduce confrontation and improve ethnic "cohabitation". For example, a holistic approach to understanding how medicine serves as an element that allows social cohabitation in such settings could provide new insights into the role of medicine as cultural currency between distinct or even antagonistic societies. Given the overwhelming social and political dominance of the mestizo cultures over Indigenous ones in the region, Indigenous people consciously seek to recreate the boundaries that can strengthen their precariously kept ethnic identity. This study has been an exploratory one that has focused on Indigenous medicine as only one of the many cultural alternatives of Indigenous peoples to claim and affirm ethnic identity. Drawing from this dissertation, a study on the relationship of medical pluralism and multiple ethnic identities in social settings of prevalent multiethnic contact could be developed to improve social relations between mestizo and Indigenous people, and the medical dialogue between Indigenous medicine and biomedicine (Last 1986; Spack 2001).

Furthermore, by focusing on inter-regional, comparative and even cross-cultural studies on the extra-medical usages of medicine as they relate to the construction and delineation of ethnic identity, we can expand our understanding of a new trend of identity formation and the extra-medical usages of medicine, particularly in societies in which the realm of medicine is inextricably intertwined with other spheres of social life.

Final Remarks

> [The Indigenous person] is now part of a larger inversion of Western cosmology in which the traditional other, a modern category, is no longer the starting point of a long and positive evolution of civilization, but a voice of Wisdom, a way of life in tune with nature, a culture in harmony, a *gemeinschaft*,[37] that we have all but lost (Friedman.1999:391).

By no means, I have tried to portray Veracruceños as inherently good, ecological saints, or infallibly peaceful people, as has often been the general romanticized tendency in anthropology (see Kelly 1995). I am aware that Indigenous peoples in the Americas were, and continue to be, distinct cultural, political and ethnic societies, but that some of them, nevertheless, can teach us (members of industrialized societies) useful lessons about ecological soundness and peaceful ethnic cohabitation.

Perhaps, I have, in some respect, over emphasized the urgency Veracruceños have to hold to an Indigenous identity precisely because they particularly perceive it is being threatened by the larger mestizo culture. Les Field (1999) claims that, given the inextricable intertwining of mestizo and Indigenous identities, mestizaje is a discourse far less threatening to Native communities in Nicaragua, where so far, no government has deployed an official anthropology to certify who is and is not allowed to call themselves an Indigenous person. My research has taught me that in general, Nicaraguan mestizos do not need an official policy to discriminate, penetrate or disrupt Indigenous cultures. Furthermore, the threat Veracruceños see comes from a mestizo culture that does not need to be certified or validated by any official government policy to be real or to have the status of an imminent problem for Veracruceños and other Indigenous people in Nicaragua. The threat is real and the need to take action is urgent. Veracruceños current emphasis on their Indigenous medicine as a marker of Indigenous identity is one symptom of this urgency.

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[37] This is German word, translated as 'community', used by sociologist Ferdinand Tonnies (1855-1936) to define an 'ideal type', or model, society where social bonds are personal and direct and there are strong-shared values and beliefs.

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[38] There are two different spellings.

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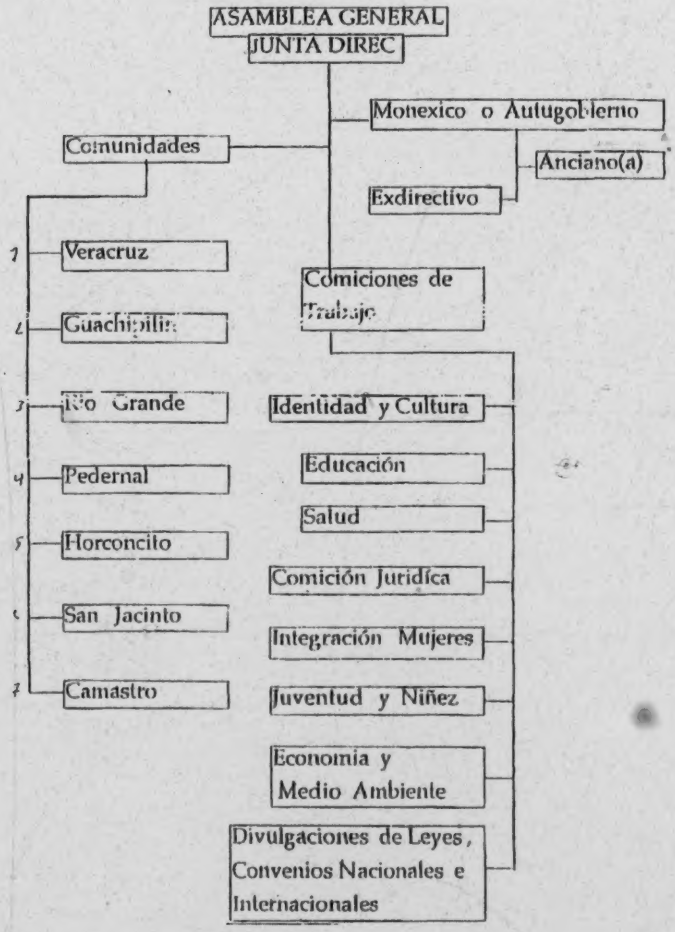
Appendix 1.

Diagram of the Veracruz social, administrative and political organization as they see it.

ORGANIGRAMA ESTRUCTURAL DEL P/I VERACRUZ DEL ZAPOTAL


ASAMBLEA GENERAL
JUNTA DIREC
Monexico o Autugobierno
Comunidades
Anciano(a)
Exdirectivo
1
Veracruz
2
Guachipilin
3
Río Grande
4
Pedernal
5
Horconcito
6
San Jacinto
7
Camastro
Comiciones de Trabajo
Identidad y Cultura
Educación
Salud
Comición Jurídica
Integración Mujeres
Juventud y Niñez
Economia y Medio Ambiente
Divulgaciones de Leyes, Convenios Nacionales e Internacionales

Appendix 2.

Over 200 organizations from around the world signed a letter to stop Water privatization in Nicaragua. Here I include only a partial list of the Nicaraguan Indigenous organizations, which signed the document.

Dr. Enrique V. Iglesias
Presidente
Banco Interamericano de Desarrollo
Washington, DC
EE.UU.

Estimado Dr. Iglesias:

Nosotros los abajo firmantes, representantes de organizaciones que conocen los trágicos impactos de las fracasadas privatizaciones de servicios públicos en muchos países, estamos preocupados al conocer las intenciones de privatizar la modernizacion de la gestión de los servicios de agua potable y alcantarillado en Nicaragua. El pueblo nicaraguense sufre las consecuencias económicas y sociales de la generalizada privatización entre ellas está la privatización del suministro eléctrico y de telecomunicaciones en su país y se ha movilizado para protestar contra la privatización del agua, pues al igual que nosotros, consideran que el acceso a este recurso es un derecho humano. Dada la importancia de este servicio, es necesaria la participación plena de la sociedad en la discusión y toma de decisiones sobre su destino, cosa que no ha ocurrido en este caso.

Es evidente para las organizaciones ciudadanas en Nicaragua que los objetivos de esta concesión son pasar la responsabilidad del organismo nacional, ENACAL, a una empresa trasnacional que administrará y decidirá todo lo relacionado con el presente y futuro del servicio de agua y alcantarillado. Para ello se emplearán $13.9 millones de dolares estadounidenses que el Banco Interamericano de Desarrollo está otorgando a cuenta de nuevas deudas que tendrán que pagar todos los nicaragüenses, sin contar las comisiones o incentivos que adicionalmente ofertan a la empresa que resulte ganadora. Las fuentes de trabajo de los empleados de ENACAL quedarían a merced de la compañía consultora que los volverá a contratar sólo si le resulta conveniente en abierta violación de los convenios colectivos.

Queremos recordar al BID que en el año 2003 se aprobó en Nicaragua la Ley 440 que prohíbe cualquier tipo de concesión sobre el agua o los recursos hídricos mientras no sea aprobado una ley general de aguas, la cual se está debatiendo en este momento en la Asamblea Nacional.

Por los señalados, le instamos a que cancele el Préstamo 1049/SF-NI que financia la concesión para la modernización de la gestión de los servicios de agua potable y alcantarillado de Nicaragua, por su ilegalidad frente a las normas legales vigentes y porque solo representa más endeudamiento para el pueblo nicaragüense.

Atentamente,

cc. Ing. Enrique Bolaños Geyer, Presidente de la República
Ing. Carlos Antonio Noguera Pastora, Presidente de la Asamblea Nacional
Luis Henry Debayle Solís, ENACAL

Firman:

Organizaciones miembros/as de COMPA en Nicaragua:
1.- Asociación de Consumidores de Masaya (ACODEMA)
2.- Asociación Mujer y Comunidad, San Francisco Libre
3.- Asociación para el Desarrollo Agro ecológico Regional (ADAR)
4.- Asociación para el Desarrollo del Agua Potable (ASDACEM)
5.- APROCONIC
6.- Casa de la Mujer de Bocana de Paiwas
7.- Centro de Estudios Internacionales (CEI)
8.- Comité de Lucha Popular (CLP)
9.- Cooperativa Central de Servicios Múltiples "Campesinos Activos de Jalapa"
10.- Colectivo de Mujeres de San Juan de Limay
11.- Comité de Agua, Tisma
12.- Empresa de Sistema de Agua y Acueducto, S.A. (ESAASA)
13.- Grupo de Solidaridad El Arenal (GRUDESA)
14.- Monéxico Nahuas - Pueblo Indígena Veracruz del Zapotal Rivas
15.- Movimiento Indígena de Jinotega (MIJ)
16.- Movimiento Indígena Nahuas y Chorotega (MINCH)
17.- Monéxico Chorotega - Pueblo Indígena de San Lucas, Madriz
18.- Consejo de Indígenas de Las Salinas Nahualapa

Appendix 3.

Members of the Nahua Monéxico from Veracruz, Rivas, Nicaragua, Cecilia Gullén, Amaury De Burgos and the author.

The author' with his son, Amaury, and wife Cecilia during the fieldwork

Appendix 4.

This is a copy of the written agreement between community leaders and the author that authorize him to conduct ethnographic research in the Indigenous community of Veracruz del Zapotal.

Pueblo Indígena Veracruz del Zapotal, Rivas Nicaragua, Octubre 29 de 2001.

Convenio de investigación antropológica entre el antropólogo Lic. Hugo De Burgos y las autoridades formales y tradicionales del pueblo y comunidades Indígenas Veracruz del Zapotal. Rivas, Nicaragua.

En reunión extraordinaria convocada por el organismo administrativo y del consejo de principales del autogobierno comunitario (MONEXICO) del pueblo Indígena Veracruz del Zapotal, en casa del señor Marciano Carbonero Víctor el día 25 de octubre del año 2001, con el objetivo de analizar las normas de solicitud del antropólogo, Lic. Hugo De Burgos, de nacionalidad salvadoreña-canadiense, radicado en Canadá, y residiendo temporalmente en Rivas, el cual solicita permiso para llevar acabo un estudio antropológico en nuestro pueblo y comunidades, siendo este estudio parte de su tesis doctoral para la Universidad de Alberta, Edmonton, Canadá. De esta tesis doctoral nuestro pueblo y comunidades recibirá une copia en el idioma inglés y obtendrán los manuscritos de la parte del estudio realizado en Veracruz y comunidades Indígenas en el idioma español y el con la posibilidad de gestar, a través de las autoridades de Veracruz del Zapotal, fondos para la traducción del texto al español.

Consideraciones éticas de la investigación

Este trabajo de investigación se realizará con la plena aceptación de que la principal máxima ética de la investigación moderna es el respeto a la dignidad humana reconocida y ejecutada internacionalmente en base al significado de los derechos humanos, y de acuerdo a las reglas estipuladas por el Tri-Consejo de la Declaración de Políticas y Conducta Ética en la Investigación con Sujetos Humanos, y a los estándares de la Universidad de Alberta Para la Protección de los Participantes Humanos, y los ocho principios del Manual de Políticas Éticas de la Facultad de Estudios Postgraduados de la Universidad de Alberta, sesión 66, y de acuerdo a las leyes y normas que rigen la república de Nicaragua, en especial a los derecho de los pueblos Indígenas, tanto nacionales como locales, así mismo como las leyes y ordenanzas, convenios y otros sobre los derechos Indígenas, Convenio 169 de la Organización Internacional del Trabajo

(OIT), la Declaración Americana sobre Derechos de los Pueblos Indígenas de la Organización para la Salud (OPS), la Organización Mundial para la Salud (OMS) sobre salud Indígena y demás instrumentos internacionales.

Garantías

Yo, Lic. Hugo De Burgos garantizo que todos y todas las personas que participen en esta investigación serán protegidas y tratadas con dignidad en cumplimiento de lo antes mencionado y consensuado con las autoridades del pueblo Indígena Veracruz del Zapotal, estipulado a la vez en los ocho principios del manual de Políticas Éticas de la Facultad de Estudios Postgraduados de la Universidad de Alberta, sesión 66, que son los siguientes:

1) Respeto a la dignidad humana.
2) Respeto al consentimiento libre y bien informado.
3) Respeto a las personas vulnerables, niños, discapacitados, ancianos y enfermos.
4) Respeto a la privacidad y a la confidencialidad.
5) Respeto a la justicia y la inclusividad.
6) Balance de beneficios y/o posibles perjuicios.
7) Minimizar posibles daños o perjuicios.
8) Maximizar los beneficios.

Sobre la encuesta y la investigación

Durante el período de investigación en el pueblo y territorio Indígena también se llevará a cabo una encuesta o censo meticuloso que explorará los siguientes aspectos:

1) Nombres, apellidos y fechas de nacimientos.
2) Número de familias.
3) Número de familias ausentes.
4) Número de familias itinerantes.
5) Número de miembros de cada familia.
6) Edades, género y origen de los miembros de cada grupo familiar.
7) Número de personas viviendo en cada unidad familiar.
8) Número de miembros del grupo familiar que viven fuera de él.
9) Condiciones socio-económicas de los miembros de cada familia.
10) Organización y estratificación familiar.
11) Pertenencias domesticas (enseres domésticos, animales, y servicios).
12) Condición de Indígena por asociación o por conciencia de identidad.
13) Datos generales sobre la religión, la educación, la salud y ocupación.

Este trabajo será realizado durante los meses de noviembre del 2001 a Diciembre del 2002, exceptuando el mes de enero ya que en esta fecha el investigador estará fuera del país.

Compromisos del investigador

Yo, Hugo De Burgos me comprometo a:

1) entregar a las autoridades antes mencionadas copia de toda la información estadística y de los datos vitales que se adquieran durante el estudio en el pueblo Veracruz y sus comunidades.
2) entregar a las autoridades del pueblo Veracruz del Zapotal una copia de todos los materiales fotográficos, audiovisuales, mapas, planos y gráficos en general que se produzca o se reproduzcan durante el estudio en el pueblo Veracruz y sus comunidades.
3) que, como práctica de autenticidad etnográfica, un grupo seleccionado de líderes del pueblo y comunidades lleve a cabo la revisión del texto final de la investigación relevante al del pueblo Veracruz con el fin de corregir errores, inconsistencias o reafirmar postulados y verificar la exactitud histórica del la información.
4) poner a la disposición de las autoridades del pueblo Indígena Veracruz del Zapotal y sus comunidades los derechos de autor del texto de esta investigación, en caso que dichas autoridades estuvieran interesadas en su publicación para beneficio del pueblo y sus comunidades.

ACUERDOS:

Después de dos reuniones previas en las que se discutieron todos los puntos aquí tratados, el consejo de principales del MONEXICO, y la junta directiva administrativa del pueblo Indígena Veracruz del Zapotal, reunidos en sesión extraordinaria, acuerdan lo siguiente:

1) Autorizar al antropólogo, Lic. Hugo De Burgos para que poniendo lo mejor de sus habilidades antropológicas lleve a cabo dicho estudio, el cual gustoso y personalmente nos ha solicitado, con el pleno conocimiento de que este estudio es parte de un requisito para completar su tesis doctoral en la Universidad de Alberta, Edmonton, Canadá.

2) Que la parte del estudio correspondiente a nuestro pueblo será sobre las distintas maneras en las que los miembros de este pueblo Indígena y en particular los médicos naturistas autóctonos, diagnostican, tratan y clasifican distintas enfermedades, todo esto enmarcado en el contexto general de la cultura e historia del pueblo.

3) Que en la medida que sea necesario líderes de la comunidad acompañarán en el territorio Indígena al investigador durante el período de consulta, siempre y cuando dicha compañía no interfiera con la privacidad de los entrevistados.

4) Que por lo tanto ningún procedimiento, método, curso, conducta o rutina contravendrá lo acordado en este convenio.

Quedando en estricto apego a lo antes mencionado y quedando inscrito en los libros de registro del pueblo Indígena Veracruz del Zapotal, firmamos en dos originales en el pueblo Indígena, propiamente en la comunidad de Veracruz, municipio y departamento de Rivas, Nicaragua, a los 29 días del mes de octubre del año dos mil uno.

Appendix 5

Some sample questions:

1. Community identity and history

¿Qué información conoce usted sobre la historia de Veracruz?

¿De que manera están relacionadas la historia y la identidad cultural de este pueblo?

¿Cuáles aspecto de las historia de este pueblo considera usted más importantes?

2. Indigenous struggles for survival

¿Han tenido que luchar en este pueblo para mantener la identidad Indígena en este pueblo?

¿Cómo ha logrado sobrevivir la identidad Indígena en este pueblo?

¿Qué tipo de luchas han implementado para sobrevivir como pueblo Indígena en Veracruz y a nivel nacional?

3. Mestizo threat to Indigenous identity and culture

¿Considera usted que la cultura mestizo es una amenaza para la cultura Indígena en Veracruz y en general?

¿De que manera es la cultura mestiza una amenaza para la identidad cultural Indígena?

¿Cree usted que las instituciones gubernamentales, como expresiones del pueblo mestizo, son una amenaza para la identidad Indígena?

¿Siente usted que la cultura y la identidad Indígena están de alguna manera amenazadas?

¿Que cosas, personas, instituciones o circunstancias representa esa amenaza?

¿De que manera piensa usted que la globalización afecta la cultura y la identidad Indígena de Veracruz y de los Indígenas de Nicaragua?

¿Representa la sociedad mestiza una amenaza para la cultura y la identidad Indígena?

¿De qué manera pueden los Veracruceños proteger su identidad?

¿Por qué es la identidad Indígena importante en Veracruz y para los pueblos Indígenas?

¿De que manera las costumbres Indígenas protegen la identidad de la comunidad?

4. Indigenous medicine as a cultural expression

¿Qué es lo que hace la medicina Indígena Indígena?

¿Considera usted que la medicina de alguna manera expresa la identidad Indígena?

¿De que maneras la medicina Indígena expresa la cultura y la identidad de este pueblo?

¿De qué manera la medicina Indígenas contribuye a mantener y fortalecer la identidad Indígena?

¿Por qué o de qué manera la medicina Indígena es diferente a la medicina del sistema médico nacional?

¿Aparte de mantener a la comunidad saludable, cual otra es la importancia de la medicina Indígena para la comunidad?

5. Territoriality and Indigeneity

¿Cual es la importancia de la territorialidad Indígena?

¿Cuál es la relación entre territorio e identidad Indígena?

¿Cual es la historia del territorio Indígena de Veracruz?

6. Markers of identity

¿Qué significa para usted la identidad Indígena?

¿Qué factores determinan la identidad Indígena en este pueblo?

¿Cómo se establecen los límites que delinean las Identidad Indígena?

7. Halers as cultural agents

¿Qué papel juegan los curanderos de este pueblo en términos de promover la cultura y la identidad Indígena?

¿Es la medicina Indígena propiedad de los curanderos o de la comunidad entera?

8. Medicine and ideas of selfhood.

¿Cual es la relación entre la medicina Indígena y el individuo?

9. Indigenous national unity through medicine

¿Que símbolos crean unidad Indígena en Nicaragua?

¿Puede la medicina Indígena ser un símbolo de unidad cultural?

10. Sample questions related to healing, health and illness.

1) ¿Practica usted la medicina tradicional?
2) ¿Es usted curandero?
3) ¿Ofrece consultas usted a la gente enferma?
4) ¿Lo visitan personas para que los cure?
5) ¿Los cura?
6) ¿Los sana?
7) ¿Cual es la diferencia entre sanar y curar?
8) ¿Cómo sabe usted si alguien está enfermo?
9) ¿Cómo sabe que tipo de enfermedad tiene un paciente?
10) ¿Cómo los cura?
11) ¿Qué tipo de cosas (herramientas, utensilios, instrumentos) utiliza para tratar sus pacientes?
12) ¿Qué tipo de medicamentos usa para tratar a sus pacientes?
13) ¿Usa la misma medicina para tratar una misma enfermedad en diferentes pacientes?

14) ¿Qué tipo de enfermedades sana?
15) ¿De donde obtiene la medicina?
16) ¿Prepara usted mismo la medicina que utiliza acá?
17) ¿Cuanta medicina usa para tratar a un paciente que sufre de enfermedad X?
18) ¿Cuanto dura un tratamiento?
19) ¿Le cobra a sus pacientes?
20) ¿Cuanto les cobra por visita, tratamiento etc.?
21) ¿Cómo se hizo curandero usted?
22) ¿Por qué se hizo curandero usted?
23) ¿Por qué cree usted que la gente se enferma?
24) ¿Por qué cree usted que unas personas se enferman con más frecuencia que otras?
25) ¿Qué es una enfermedad?
26) ¿Qué significa estar enfermo?
27) ¿Qué es lo que hace que la medicina funcione?
28) ¿Cómo la gente se contagia con enfermedad X?
29) ¿Qué tipo de medicina es más efectiva para tratar enfermedad X?
30) ¿Cómo la gente pude prevenir enfermedad X?
31) ¿Por qué los pacientes vienen a verlo a usted en vez de visitar a un médico particular?
32) ¿Por qué no toda la gente usa este tipo de medicina (tradicional)?
33) ¿Por qué cree usted que la medicina tradicional es importante?
34) ¿Qué otro tipo de funciones juega la medina tradicional además de sanar?

Hoja informativa sobre enfermedades tradicionales en Veracruz del Zapotal

Nombre de la enfermedad________________________ ¿Tiene otro nombre, es conocida con otro nombre?

¿Que la causa?
____

¿Es esa la única causa, existen otras causas?

____

¿Cómo se cura?

____

¿Es ese el único tratamiento, de qué otra manera se cura?

____

Detalles de la curación o tratamiento ______________________________

____

Simbología ____

Características del curandero _______________________________________

Ethical questions: Si se publicara esta información:

1) ¿Podríamos comprometer a alguien en esta comunidad?

2) ¿Podríamos perjudicar a alguien en esta comunidad?

3) ¿Le faltaríamos el respeto a alguien en esta comunidad?

4) ¿Pondríamos poner en peligro a alguien en esta comunidad?

5) ¿Podríamos molestar o resentir a alguien en esta comunidad?